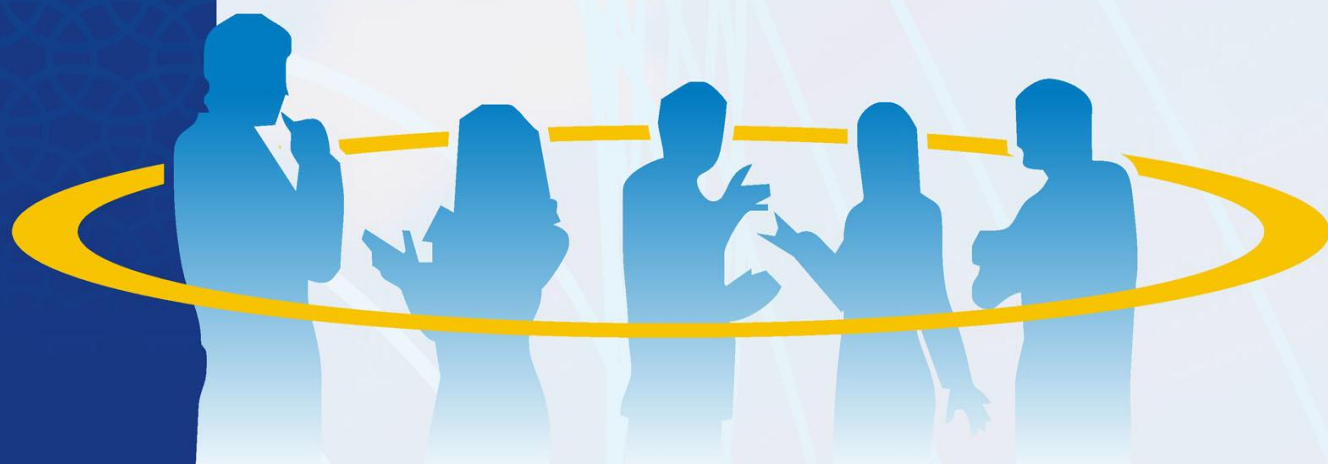




# **NATIONAL REPORT**

## **ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL**

**AUSTRIA**



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## AUSTRIAN NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL

### 1 Introduction

The aim of the present report is to give information about the implementation of the European Language Label in Austria.

In this report, we have used a top-down approach and a bottom-up one.

Firstly, a top-down approach aiming to identify the national actions carried out in order to implement the European Language Label. This first part of the report includes: the identification of the national institution in charge of the European Language Label in Austria, the description of the specific responsibilities assigned to this institution, the national organization of the Label campaigns, the national priorities and the selection criteria and the statistics about awarded projects in terms of target groups and languages.

Most of the information included in this part of the present report represents the point of view of the institution which is in charge of the European Language Label in Austria and it was extracted from various reports compiled in Austria during the 1998-2011 period. This was supplemented with information about awarded projects which can be found on the website of the European Commission.

Secondly, a bottom-up approach carried out by the PROSPER-ASE team, aiming to carry out a follow up of projects that were awarded the European Language Label in Austria. This second part of the report includes: the impact of the European Label on the awarded projects, the dissemination and exploitation activities carried out by the awarded project promoters, as well as some recommendations coming from the awarded project promoters in order to improve the European Language Label initiative.

**Acknowledgements & Limitations:** We know that project promoters are very busy professionals, and therefore, we are particularly grateful to those who took their time to respond to our messages and questions. Special thanks go also to the ÖSZ-representatives, who kindly offered us their support and provided us with very useful information. At the same time, given the project promoters' busy schedule, it has been more difficult to obtain more detailed information from some of them. We had, therefore, to restrict our research to the 25 projects included in the data base and the Case studies presented on the NELLIP project portal, and to select from the wealth of information provided on the website of the ÖSZ. Consequently, some of the findings are more difficult to generalise, and some of the conclusions of the present report were inferred from the description of the 25 projects included in the Nellip database.

## 2 The European Language Label in Austria

The European Language Label (ELL) has been awarded in Austria since 1998, under the name *Europäisches Spracheninnovationssiegel* (ESIS, or the European Language Innovation Seal).

It is directed at organisations or private individuals that implement innovative projects in the field of language learning and teaching. The ELL gives people the opportunity to receive recognition and support for outstanding work in the language field. Target groups are private individuals and institutions from all over Austria and include nursery schools, schools, teacher training colleges, universities and universities of applied science, adult education institutes, associations, regional governments, city authorities, municipalities, media, libraries and companies, etc.

In Austria, the implementation of the *Europäisches Spracheninnovationssiegel*, the ESIS competition and the development of specific actions in accordance with the EU general strategies are ensured by the *Österreichisches Sprachen Kompetenz Zentrum* (Austrian Centre for Language Competence ÖSZ) on behalf of

- The *Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur* (the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture BMUKK),
- the *Nationalagentur Lebenslanges Lernen* (National Agency for Lifelong Learning) and in cooperation with
- the *Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Forschung* (the Federal Ministry for Science and Research BMWF).

The ÖSZ carries out the following activities for the implementation of the ELL awarding process:

- promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities and experiences offered by the European Language Label
- yearly organization and publication of the call for applicants
- selection process of the applications
- organization of the award ceremony
- evaluation of the situation regarding the ELL followed by a yearly report which includes the presentation of all the awarded projects in the respective year
- monitoring and valorization of projects that were awarded the European Language Label



### 3 The Label Campaigns

The implementation of the ELL competition gives the Österreichischen Sprachen Kompetenz Zentrum(ÖSZ) the opportunity to disseminate best practice models of Austrian kindergardens, schools, higher education institutions and universities, adult education institutions and associations.

Many ELL awarded institutions participated in further language development programmes initiated by the ÖSZ, such as the European Day of Languages. Also, a great number of schools which were conferred the label become “SPIN-schools” (SPRachenInnovationsNetzwerk-Schulen, Network for Language Innovation). The network should stimulate exchanges between schools and teaching staff and provide them with support to initiate and evaluate projects.

#### 3.1 Promotion

One of the goals of ELL is to reward innovative initiatives and projects, in order to motivate others to take initiative and develop a creative, innovative spirit. The ELL competition should enhance the interest in learning languages and in this way contribute to making Europe a place with multilingual citizens.

In order to reach this goal it is necessary to disseminate the information about the projects awarded the ELL accordingly and to support their implementation.

Since 1998, ÖSZ has been using various strategies for disseminating the ELL and encouraging the participation of stakeholders:

- publication of brochures containing information about application procedures and forms to be filled in. The brochures also contain useful information about who can take part in the competition, the theme of the year, the characteristics a project should have in order to be selected, the criteria that apply during the selection process, what the prize consists of, contact details, etc. This information is also posted on the website of ÖSZ: for example see:  
[http://oesz.cpweb.at/download/esis/esis\\_themenblatt2011\\_web.pdf](http://oesz.cpweb.at/download/esis/esis_themenblatt2011_web.pdf)
- publication of yearly reports, also posted on the website of the ÖSZ, including statistics and analyses regarding the number of applications submitted every year, the distribution per target groups (schools, universities, VET institutions, adult education institutions, pedagogical institutes, teacher training organisations, etc.). These yearly reports include a full list and descriptions of the awarded projects, with contact details. As an example, see:  
[http://www.oesz.at/sub\\_main.php?direkt=bereich.php?bereich=2|tree=6](http://www.oesz.at/sub_main.php?direkt=bereich.php?bereich=2|tree=6)
- creation and maintenance of a project databank, where one can see the names of all the projects which applied for the ELL grouped by year, with a clear indication of the ones which obtained the award. For more information one can also access the project website, which is mentioned next to the name of the promoter and that of the awarded project.
- organization of the yearly award ceremony in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK), the National Agency for Lifelong Learning and the Federal Ministry for Science and Research.

While in the first years the competition focused on the awarding of the label to projects and initiatives, the main concern, both in Europe and in Austria now lies with the area of networking and providing access to the results.

One of the first measures undertaken by the European Commission for a better marketing of European innovations was the setting up of a database of projects which had been awarded the European Language Label. Immediately afterwards, Austria became involved in promoting and supporting the implementation of measures meant to foster networking. In 2003, a conference organised by the European Commission in Denmark gave a further impulse to networking and use of the results. The goal of this conference was to strengthen the impact of the European Language Label Competition and to discuss how to find ways of making best use and disseminate the results of the ELL awarded projects. At the conference Austria presented results of its research projects (see also <http://www.sprachen.ac.at/esis>), as well as ideas on support and networking with a view to innovation.

During all the years that have passed since the introduction of the ELL, Austria has had a leading position not only concerning the number of applications, but also in terms of data use and evaluation.

The research project entitled “Innovation in Fremdsprachenunterricht” (Innovation in foreign language education) undertaken by the universities of Graz and Vienna in cooperation with the Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum resulted in a very pertinent evaluation of the results of this initiative.

ÖSZ is committed to disseminating best practices in language teaching and language learning. In this sense, a network of schools has been set up with the purpose of offering support and inspiration for introducing innovation in the language teaching/learning process. The network called SPIN (Das SprachenInnovationsNetzwerk) was inspired by the European Language Label and it connects regions in Austria, schools and teachers both horizontally and vertically, at national level. In this way, knowledge and information about innovation in language learning, instruments and know-how related to evaluation and self-evaluation can circulate and provide a framework for quality in language education.

### 3.2 Calls for Applicants

Every year ÖSZ launches a call for applicants for the ELL. However, since 1998 there were two exceptions, namely the years 2001 and 2012, when instead of a ELL competition, an evaluation process took place. The first evaluation looked at the 1998-2000 period, while the one carried out this year is analyzing a selection of 27 projects which received the European Label during the last 10 years with respect to plurilingualism/multilingualism and language teaching in school education. The results will be released by the end of 2012.

There is only one call for applicants per year and the distinctions are granted at the same time for the different educational sectors. The applications are usually submitted in springtime (April), they are evaluated and the award ceremony is in September-October.

The call for applicants provides information about the national theme of the year, about the criteria that will be taken into consideration during the selection process and provides guidance for the submission of the application form.

The ÖSZ uses several strategies for promoting the ELL and for the dissemination of the initiative in order to motivate relevant stakeholders to apply and to encourage institutions to further disseminate the information about the distinction:

- availability of all the necessary information on the website of ÖSZ (theme of the year, information brochure about the ELL and the European priorities, candidature forms, details regarding the award ceremony in the yearly reports – starting with 2002).
- Dissemination of information in educational institutions and in particular in schools the SPIN network (SPRachenInnovationsNetzwerk-Schulen / Network for Language Innovation)

### 3.3 The selection of winning projects

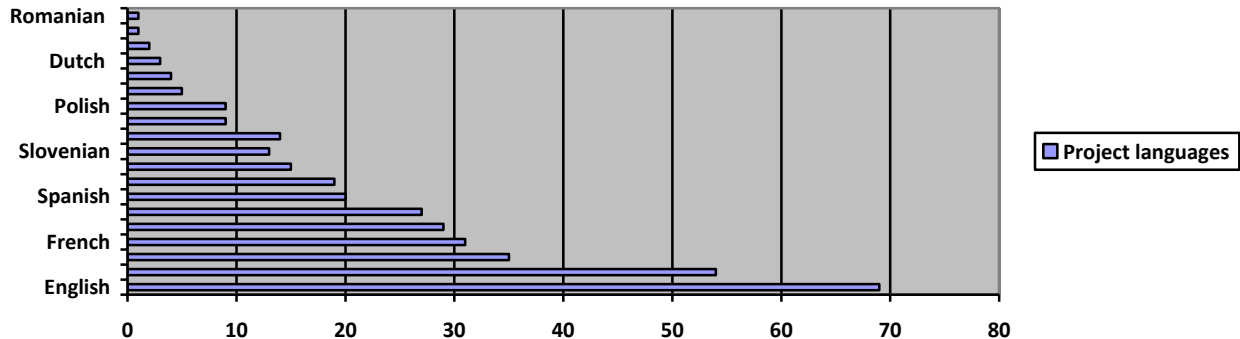
Submitted projects should already be at an advanced stage of implementation, go beyond general guidelines as set out in national curricula or the basic goals of the sponsoring institutions, and be able to demonstrate pertinent evaluation findings and results. Initiatives of a purely commercial nature are not taken into consideration.

Private individuals and institutions applying again need to present a project which differs significantly from the formerly submitted one, or which has developed considerably in the meantime.

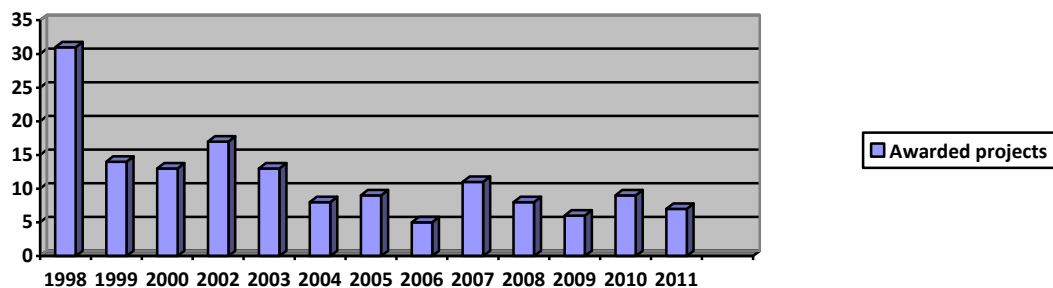
In Austria the European Language Label competition is understood as a contribution to the support and stimulation of language diversity and social cohesion and therefore targets particularly projects which take into consideration less frequently learnt languages.

The projects which were awarded the European Language Label cover a wide range of languages. English is the most common target language of the projects awarded the ELL in Austria between 1998 and 2011: 69 out of the 111 projects present in the databank of the European Commission have English as their target language. German as a foreign language and as a second language is also well represented (54 projects out of 111), followed by Italian (35 projects), French (31), Croatian (29), Turkish (27), Bosnian (14), Hungarian (19), Czech (15), Slovenian (13) and even Chinese (6). Less represented are languages such as Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, Lebanese, Bulgarian and Romanian, including languages of migrants and asylum seeking persons and their children.

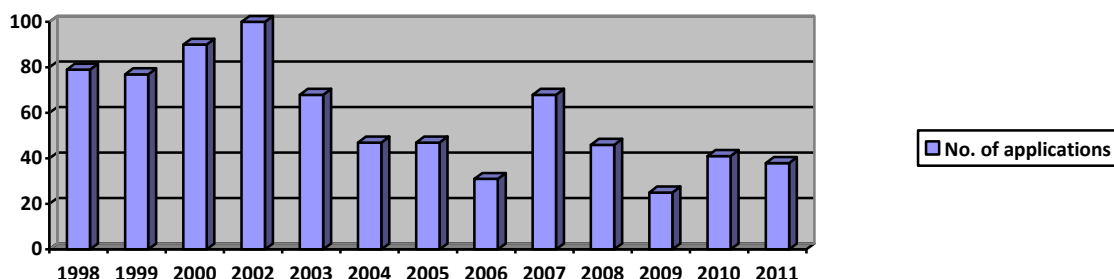
The bar chart below illustrates this situation:



Below one can see the number of awarded projects in Austria between 1998 and 2011. The highest number of awarded projects was in 1998, when 31 projects were selected, and the lowest in 2006, with 5 winning projects.







Although there was significant decrease in the number of applications after 2002 (when the highest number was registered - 100), with the exception of the years 2006 and 2009 the number of applications has always been around or above 40. When compared to overall European figures, Austria holds a leading place as far as both applications and awards are concerned.

In order to avoid a "label inflation", Austria restricted the prizes to be awarded to 15 labels per year.

The projects awarded the ELL are selected by a team of experts. The jury has a President (currently a professor at the University of Vienna), the composition of the jury changes every year and the applications are evaluated by experts in the specific theme chosen for the respective year. A specialist from another European country is also part of the Austrian jury.

The winning projects receive:

- a framed certificate
- the right to display the logo of the „European Language Label" with indication of the respective year
- a financial recognition of 750 euro.

### 3.4 The Awarding Ceremony

In Austria the awarding ceremonies are organised by the ÖSZ in cooperation with the Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture BMUKK), the Nationalagentur Lebenslanges Lernen (National Agency for Lifelong Learning) and the Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Forschung (the Federal Ministry for Science and Research BMWF).

In 2011, the awarding ceremony was held as part of a conference organised jointly by ÖSZ and the Austrian authorities together with Education Ministries in Belgium and Germany. Around 30 projects produced in the last few years, covering a very wide range of areas within the Lifelong Learning Programme were represented. This was a wonderful opportunity for exchanging experience and disseminating examples of good practice across borders.

## 4 Priorities

The European Commission proposes every year specific priorities for the European Language Label award. The yearly priorities aim to identify experiences that, for their specificity and for the results achieved, clearly refer to a political and strategic framework for improving and promoting language teaching and learning.

Besides these specific European priorities, in Austria the national priorities are represented by the themes which are established every year. These are taken into consideration when the selection of the winning projects is made. The first year after the introduction of the European Language Label in Austria was a pilot year and there was no national theme. Starting with 1999, the European Language Label was awarded to projects with the following topics:

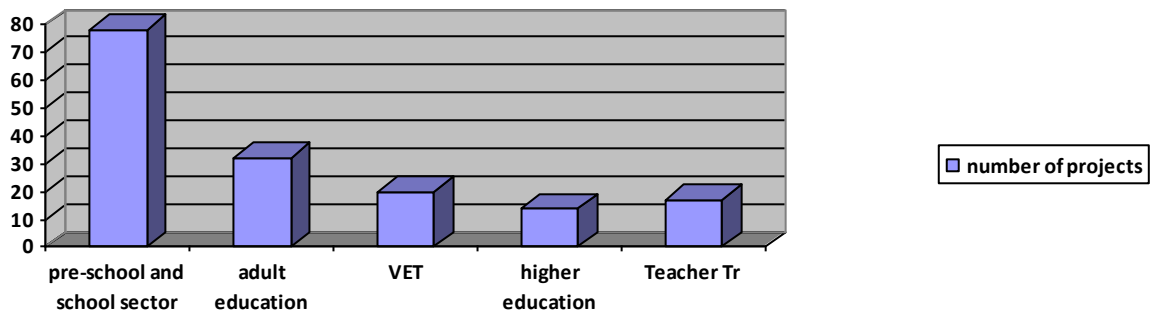
Year	Austrian National Priority in terms of theme
1998	No theme was chosen
1999	Language and work
2000	Living with linguistic diversity
2001	<b>Evaluation year</b> – there was a <b>break in the competition</b> , as the European Year of Languages took place that year an Austrian evaluation of the 1998-2000 span was undertaken.
2002	Ways to ensure quality in foreign language teaching
2003	Languages of neighboring countries, minorities and of migrants: measures to motivate and raise awareness with a view to stimulation language diversity
2004	Language learning and language teaching in vocational and adult education
2005	Early awareness raising for multilingualism as a basis for lifelong language learning
2006	Ways to stimulate the initial and further training of language teachers
2007	Languages unite – Ways towards experiencing multilingualism
2008	My, Your, Our Languages – Language Learning as a basis for intercultural dialogue and social cohesion
2009	Language Learning for the Working Environment
2010	Language Learning / Education in the Community – Using resources and developing competencies
2011	Knowledge of languages in preparation for working life
2012	<b>Evaluation year</b> – <b>break in the competition</b> . A selection of 27 projects are being analysed with a focus on plurilingualism/multilingualism and languages in schooling. The final report will be available by the end of the year 2012.

## 5 Awarding the European Language Label

Since the introduction of the European Language Label in Austria, in 1998, 111 projects in total received the award (source: European Commission databank). Although institutions and individuals are invited to apply for the European Language Label, in Austria only projects can receive the ELL, not individuals.

Both concerning the number of applications and that of awards, schools hold a top position (73% of the applications and 63% of the awards in the 1998-2003 period). For the same period, Universities, technical colleges, adult learning institutions, associations, submitted 27% of the applications and were awarded 37% of the prizes. A similar situation to that of Austria is manifest all over Europe, where the school sector, particularly secondary education is dominant.

The chart below presents the distribution of the 111 projects uploaded on the European database by educational sectors:



## 6 Evaluation carried out by the NELLIP Romanian Team

The NELLIP Network has the aim to promote quality in language learning through the implementation of the quality criteria used to award the European Language Label.

The PROSPER-ASE team has identified a number of 25 Austrian projects which were awarded the European Language Label between 1998 and 2011, covering four target groups.

In spite of sustained efforts by the team to get in touch with promoters of awarded projects, only a small number of Case studies could be completed. The project promoters were contacted by email and initially they seemed enthusiastic about the attention their project was given, but when they understood they were invited to provide more detailed information (the questions in the questionnaire designed by the NELLIP project coordinator) they perceived this as too time-consuming and in most cases they either disappeared or excused themselves for not having the time and/or the necessary resources.

Another factor which may have demotivated them was the associated partner form they were required to fill in. Some delays occurred because of the paperwork involved, but besides this, some refused to get involved because there was no financial gain and their commitment in this sense seemed to involve some voluntary/non-paid activities to carry out in the future.

Our cooperation with the ELL- responsible was useful and is much appreciated. The support offered was related mainly to the various sections of the web site (which has a wealth of information, as already mentioned) and providing us with a list of successful project promoters. These recommendations were very useful for establishing the contact with the project promoters, but when entering in more details, their busy schedule took the upper-hand, which also has to be understood as a fact of life and priority-management.

The PROSPER-ASE team made a selection of awarded projects based on their consistency with the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning. The promoters of the selected case studies were sent a form to fill in (by email).

The objectives and results of the projects selected as Case studies comply with at least one of the priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning, namely:

- the enhancement of quality of language learning
- evaluation of performance of language teaching
- teacher training
- new approaches to language teaching and learning
- supporting mobility for language learning
- the promotion of multilingualism
- language learning for specific purposes
- tools for monitoring progresses in language learning
- recognition and validation of language skills acquired through non formal and informal learning
- implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)
- promotion of links between VET qualifications and CEFR
- promotion of less widely spoken languages

The promoters of the selected case studies were invited to fill in a questionnaire in order to provide information about the methodology applied in the awarded project, but also about why they decided to apply for the ELL and the impact they perceived as a consequence of having been awarded the European Language Label. Still, the information they provided in these areas was minimal or not entirely relevant.

The National Agency recommended that these particular projects should be selected based on the fact that they were very innovative, consistent with the annual priorities indicated by the European Commission and with the national priorities, but also considering the impact the projects have had on their target groups, during and after the project life.

## **7 Impact and Exploitation of the European Language Label as assessed by the NELLIP Team**

### **7.1 Impact**

Through the direct contact we established with the project promoters we were able to find out their reasons to apply for the European Language Label, some of which are listed below.

The promoters believed that by applying they could:

- fight again prejudices and attract attention to less known cultures
- disseminate information about their project
- give an example of successful implementation of new methodologies
- inspire and encourage others to apply for the ELL

Some of the project promoters said they applied because the project complied with all the evaluation criteria and with the priorities of the year.

Regarding the impact the ELL had on the awarded projects, the promoters mentioned the interest the media showed after the award, but also the successful implementation of the project objectives. Following the success obtained, the approach used in one of the selected projects is now being used by other schools.

As far as the benefits of having received the ELL are concerned, the project promoters mentioned the satisfaction of having contributed through their project to fostering tolerance among children, or gaining acceptance and prestige within their institution for their initiative. Other benefits seem to be a higher number of students enrolled in the respective educational institution due to the recognition gained by having been awarded the European Language Label

Although the winning projects receive an amount of money, no project promoter mentioned this as a benefit or how the money was used.

These outcomes were considered to coincide with the promoters' initial expectations.

### **7.2 Exploitation**

In order to spread information about the projects that were awarded the European language Label, a number of activities were carried out. For example, one of the project promoters mentioned sharing the news with all the teaching staff involved in the project, writing a press release and an article which was posted online. There was also a poster presentation during a conference, all meant to inform the public about the award.



## 8 Best Practices

The Case studies were also selected as Best Practices, as they can all be used as benchmarks to refer to in the planning and development of quality future language learning projects and initiatives that have the necessary characteristics to successfully apply for the European Language Label.

Best Practices projects meet the quality criteria adopted in the awarding of the European Language Label and are successful in addressing the needs of specific target groups. They are also good examples to follow in terms of the activities carried out, the quality of their outcomes and their originality. Last but not least, these projects are special for their sustainability, for their continued impact on various target groups and for their transferability.

## 9 Recommendations

Only one of the Austrian promoters offered some advice to future applicants for the European Language Label, namely:

The submitted project must not belong to the „routine offer“ of an institution.  
The implementation of the project must be minutely described in the application form.  
The project must meet the set criteria.

It must:

- be comprehensive
- provide added value to the respective context,
- be new und creative,
- contain an European dimension (cross-border contacts)
- be transferable on other contexts.

It should also:

- correspond to the theme of the national competition in order to win the ELL award.
- benefit from ongoing evaluation (feedback)

The strengths of the European Language Label as resulting from this report are that it:

- has a good impact on the awarded projects because it contributes to their visibility
- is considered as a confirmation of the quality of the initiative
- contributes to increasing the prestige of the promoting institution, leading to benefits such as a bigger number of students, higher student motivation.

The information obtained has not revealed any weaknesses of the European Language Label as perceived by the project promoters.

Recommendations for an effective further implementation of the European Language Label in Austria are based on:

- Promoting the visibility of the European Language Label among language learning providers and experts. This could be achieved:
  - By applying a targeted information strategy based on, for example, presenting the ELL in international events on language learning
  - publication of articles on the ELL in the specialized press, both written and online
  - by making use of the social networks developed specifically by/for language learning providers

- Identifying strategies to make winning the European Language Label more appealing for language providers and experts
- Raising awareness of the European Language Label meaning and impact. In order to do so the information about the European Language Label should also include:
  - a clear description of the quality meaning of the label.
  - the benefits related to the award. In order to do so, the case studies developed by the NELLIP Network might be used to present best practices as far as the benefits of the European Language Labels are concerned.
- Creating opportunities for the project promoters who were awarded the ELL to exchange experience with promoters from their own country and from all over Europe in an organized way. The promoters' motivation and enthusiasm could be very useful for disseminating information about quality initiatives and about the benefits of obtaining the European Language Label. This would allow for the creation of extended networks among project promoters.

## 10 Conclusions

By matching the quality criteria used to award the European Language Label and the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning, the PROSPER-ASE team of the NELLIP Network selected relevant language learning initiatives that were awarded the European Language Label. Among the initiatives identified by the NELLIP team, a number of relevant Case studies were selected with the help of the representatives of ÓSZ, the institution in charge of the European Language Label in Austria. These projects are considered to be among the best of those which received the European Language Label and their objectives are consistent with the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning.

The analysis of the selected projects and Case Studies demonstrates that most of the project promoters decided to submit their application to the European Language Label in order to ensure a greater visibility to the project and to obtain an official national and European recognition. Besides this, they were hoping to inspire others by sharing good practice.

The main strengths of the European Language Label resulting from this report are that it has a good impact on the awarded projects because it contributes to their visibility, it enhances the motivation of the project promoters, it is considered a confirmation of the quality of the initiative. Besides this, it contributes to raising the prestige of the promoting institution as a centre of expertise in the area of effective and innovative language teaching and learning.

The further promotion of the European Language Label in Austria should be based on:

- Finding more strategies to increase the visibility of the European Language Label among language learning providers and experts.
- Further raising awareness of the potential benefits and impact of the European Language Label for those who win it.  
Promoting increased opportunities for transnational networking, exchanges and sharing among awarded projects.

## 11 Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Ileana Racoviceanu who has contributed with feedback and information to the writing of this report. Ileana Racoviceanu is in charge of the European Language Label at the Romanian National Agency.