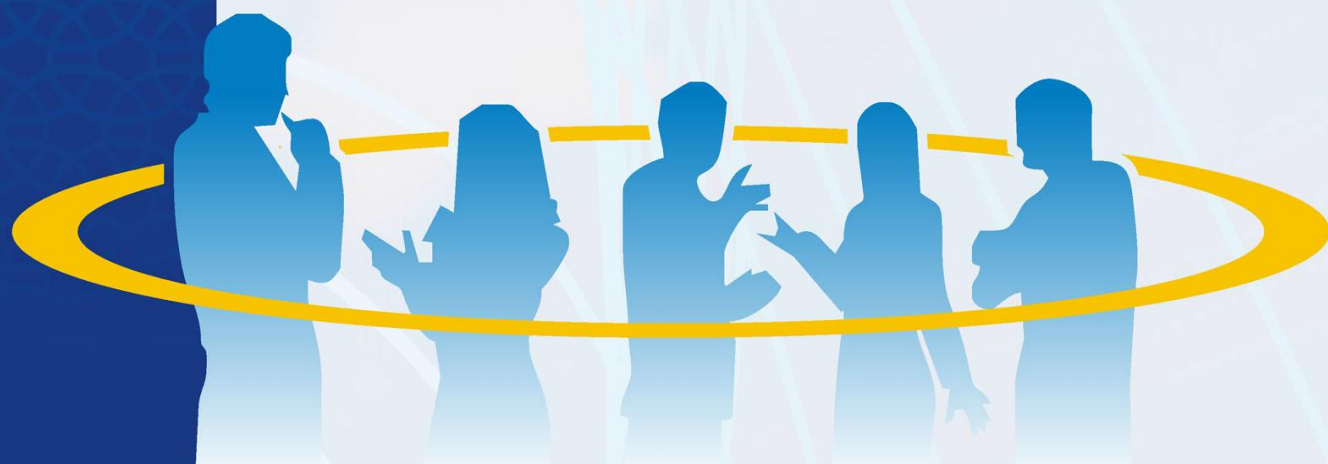




NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL

BULGARIA





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BULGARIAN 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 Bulgaria.

The present reports aims at showing how the European Language Label is organized and managed in Bulgaria, how are the national label campaigns organized, what priorities does the Label address, etc. The report also focuses on how the label is awarded in Bulgaria and provides an assessment of the impact of the label on the awarded projects.

The development of the national report is based on the results of the case studies and best practices identified and developed in Bulgaria in cooperation with project coordinators awarded with the European label and the Bulgarian National Agency.

The document provides an identification of the national institution responsible for managing the European Language Label in Bulgaria, its assigned responsibilities, European and national priorities in the area, selection and award criteria, initiatives awarded with the Label as well as the impact of the award on the selected projects.

2. The European Language Label in Bulgaria

The European Language Label is an award that encourages new initiatives in the field of teaching and learning languages, rewarding new techniques in language teaching, spreading the knowledge of their existence and thereby promoting good practices. The Label is open to all aspects of education and training, regardless of age or methods used, with its main focus being to promote innovation in language teaching. By supporting innovative projects, at a local and national level, the Label seeks to raise the standards of language teaching across Europe.

Each year, the Label is awarded to the most innovative language learning projects in each country participating in the scheme. It is coordinated by the European Commission, but managed by the assigned National Agencies in each country. The general criteria for winning the Label award are agreed at European level, but individual countries can introduce their own requirements.

In Bulgaria, the implementation of the European Language Label and the development of specific actions, in accordance with the EU general strategies, are delegated to the Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC).

HRDC was established in 1999 as a legal entity which reports to the national authorities. The Centre organizes, advises, coordinates and carries out projects and research in the field of education, vocational education and training, labor market and human resources in Bulgaria, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and other institutions, corporate bodies and individuals.





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HRDC is the coordinating body in Bulgaria of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and is working on projects in the field of education, training and labor market. The Centre works on the selection, evaluation, financing and monitoring of projects under LLP, and offers consultancy to interested stakeholders in applying for the programme.

HRDC carries out information and consulting activities related to vocational guidance through the Euroguidance centre in Bulgaria.

HRDC coordinates activities for dissemination and implementation of the Europass initiative through the National Europass Center in Bulgaria. The Centre coordinates and administers the eTwinning initiative of the European Union. Moreover, HRDC coordinates the Study visits program and the European Language Label initiative in Bulgaria.

The Centre provides consulting and technical assistance to projects in the field of human resources. HRDC collaborates with national institutions and organizations in the field of human resources and creates opportunities for cooperation with foreign organizations and institutions.

In Bulgaria, the European Language Label is awarded to successful and effective initiatives and projects in the field of language teaching and learning, regardless of the type of the educational organisations or the age of the language learners and beneficiaries. Accepted are initiatives aimed at developing and applying new models, approaches, creative and innovative practices. The awarded organizations have the right to use the European Language Label logo and they are included in the database of the European Commission.

The European Language Label competition is open to all institutions and organizations, private and public, which are involved in language teaching and learning and are lawfully registered on the territory of Bulgaria. The candidates are requested to motivate their decision for participation, to explain and back with arguments how their language initiative addresses the conditions for participation and to provide a short description covering each of the selection criteria.

The selection procedure of the European Language Label in Bulgaria is addressed to institutions of all types who have developed innovative solutions for the promotion of language learning, who include but are not limited to:

- local and regional organizations
- chambers of commerce and industry
- vocational training organizations and centres (including language private schools)
- research centres
- private companies
- universities
- schools of any kind, public schools, private schools and officially recognized schools
- volunteer organizations, non-profit organizations
- other organizations active in the field of education and training



The activities implemented by HRDC in regard to the European Language Label in Bulgaria are directed towards:

- promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities and experiences offered by the European Language Label
- organization and publication of the call for tender
- selection and awarding of candidatures
- organization of the award ceremony
- follow-up activities on dissemination of the labeled initiatives and popularization of the good practices

3. The Label Campaigns

The award of the European Language Label in Bulgaria follows a procedure which goes through a few stages:

- identification of the objectives
- identification of the selection criteria
- advertisement/promotion
- call for tenders
- evaluation
- award ceremony
- follow-up activities

3.1 Identification of the objectives

In general, the European Language Label is directed towards identifying good practices in the field of language promotion. Important requirements for the award are the innovative character of the proposals and the potential for sustainability of the achieved results and developed products.

Every year, HRDC publishes the objectives of the Label campaign which are in correspondence with the European priorities and strategies in the field of language learning and promotion. Specific objectives are published each year channeling the potential proposals into separate sub-areas of the language promotion.

3.2 Identification of the selection criteria

The submitted proposals are being evaluated against a set of selection criteria which are agreed upon before the launch of the Label campaign and published with the call for tenders. The application forms of all candidates have to address the selection criteria and provide information on each one of them. Later on, the submitted proposals are being evaluated against those criteria and feedback on them is provided by the external evaluators.

The selection criteria for the European Language Label 2012 in Bulgaria cover:

- Innovation – The submitted initiatives have to be original and innovative. They have to present new approaches and methods which haven't been used so far in the field of language teaching and learning. In the same time they have to be applicable with the target groups they are intended for.

- Comprehensiveness – Each one of the project elements (learners, teachers, materials, methods, etc.) has to guarantee that the learners' needs are being identified and satisfied.
- Motivation – The initiatives have to motivate learners and teachers to improve their language skills and competencies.
- Transferability – The initiatives have to be transferable also in other contexts with potential improvements and better results. They could inspire other initiatives in the field of language learning in different countries.
- European dimension – The projects are expected to promote the advantages of the European linguistic diversity and multilingual character and to enhance the multicultural dialogue through the development of language skills.
- Added value – The initiatives have to ensure added value in their national context. This means the delivery of tangible improvements in the language teaching and learning with regard to the quantity or the quality. The “quantity” refers to projects focused on a few languages and especially on less widely used and taught European languages. The “quality” could refer to the introduction of new methodologies for language teaching.

3.3. Advertisement/Promotion

For every Label campaign HRDC launches a number of promotional activities inviting and encouraging the participation in the European Language Label selection. The promotion is focused on increasing the popularity of the European Language Label in Bulgaria and providing information on the benefits offered by the award. The promotional campaign also informs about the European policies and strategies in the field of language promotion and multilingualism as well as announces the objectives of the Label.

The means for promotion include:

- Information posted on the HRDC website (www.hrdc.bg)
- Promotional materials distributed during events, conferences, seminars, etc.
- Newsletters sent to relevant organizations and potential candidates
- Information provided during events, conferences, seminars, etc., organised by HRDC on national level or focused on language promotion
- Information shared through HRDC's informational channels and network of partners and associates
- Promotion through the labeled projects and initiatives from previous years

As of 2012, a new means for promoting the European Language Label in Bulgaria was introduced. In order to make the award more attractive to different potential beneficiaries and more user-friendly, HRDC announced 2 separate categories for proposals:

- For organizations active in the field of language learning
- For language teachers

3.4 Call for tenders

Every year HRDC launches a call for tenders for the European Language Label with information about the objectives of the Label, the current European and national priorities, the procedure for the presentation of the candidatures, etc. Guidelines for submission of the application forms are also provided. The deadlines for submission of proposals are usually in the period August-October.

The call for tenders is published on HRDC's website and advertised through the dissemination channels described above.

3.5 Evaluation

On closing of the announced deadlines, the submitted proposals are distributed to external experts attracted specifically for the purposes of the European Language Label. The experts evaluate the proposals firstly whether they are eligible for participation in the procedure, and then against the published selection criteria.

The results from the assessment are provided to HRDC along with justification on their decision and feedback about the separate proposals. The Centre then prepares the ranking and announces the winners on its website. The winners are contacted personally by phone or email and enter into communication with HRDC regarding the award ceremony and follow-up activities.

3.6 Awarding Ceremony

An official ceremony for awarding the European Language Label to the winning candidate(s) is organised by HRDC with the aim to ensure larger dissemination, visibility and impact of the award. The event is usually attended by representatives of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, policy-makers, project coordinators and organizations involved in language education. The winning organizations are provided with the opportunity to present the awarded initiatives, and where applicable, to demonstrate their products.

The event also represents a forum for exchange of experience and ideas in the field of language learning, discussion on the current European and national priorities in the area as well as recommendations for improvement of the national policies related to language education.

In 2012, the European Language Label award ceremony took place on September 30th in Sofia as part of the event celebrating the European Day of Languages. The event took the form of a language fair where the participants had the opportunity to "taste" the actual multilingual character of Europe through entertaining language games.

3.7 Follow-up activities

The initiatives awarded with European Language Label receive the right to use the Label logo in their language products as a certificate for quality. They are also included in the national and European databases for labeled good practices.

HRDC organises annually events and seminars focused on language education and opportunities for improving language competences where labeled initiatives can share their experience and recommendations for improving the quality of language education on national and European level. A number of dissemination activities and events every year also aim to popularize the idea of the European Language Label, to promote the objectives and benefits of the award, and to provide information on the awarded projects and initiatives.

4. Priorities

Every year the European Commission comes out with specific priorities for the European Language Label award. The yearly priorities aim to identify experiences that, for their specificity and for the results achieved, are clearly referred to a political and strategic framework for improving and promoting language teaching and learning.

For the 2012-2013 Campaign, the priorities defined by the European Commission are:

- language learning based on the new technologies

This priority is defined by the Commission as follows: *“technology influences many aspects of our lives, language learning included: computer and/or technology-assisted language learning and testing, blended language learning, virtual and distance learning have become very useful tools to teach and learn foreign languages efficiently. The creation and educational use of social networks also boosts the fostering of multilingual engagement and participation across boundaries, and represents a means to interact and to learn foreign languages.*

This innovative learning/teaching system should combine the inspiration and motivation of traditional classroom teaching and the flexibility of online or distance learning to create courses that are accessible and motivating for today's students, who develop their autonomy, interact by way of a computer with teachers "on the other side of the screen" and have fun in learning a foreign language”.

- multilingual classrooms

The explanation behind this priority is that *“the phenomenon of multilingual classrooms has been constantly increasing. These classrooms are made up of students coming from different countries and not sharing a common mother tongue. Learners speak a variety of first languages, their behavior and cultures can be very different: this may create problems but can also be used as a focus of comparison and discussion. Herein lies the challenging task faced by teachers: they should adapt their teaching techniques in order to take this diversity into account and respect it, but focus on the main purpose, which is to provide learners with the best possible communication and grammar skills in the target language”.*

In Bulgaria the national priorities for the 2012-2013 European Language Label campaign overlap fully with the European ones.

5. Awarding the European Language Label

In Bulgaria the European Language Label was awarded for the first time in 2002. Currently (2012 including) a total of 15 language initiatives have received the award. In 2012 the Label was handed out in 2 separate categories: a). organizations active in the field of language learning, and b). language teachers.

The winners of the European Language Label award in Bulgaria are:

2012: Private school “Educational technologies” in the category “Organizations active in the field of language learning”

Ms Rositsa Mineva, in the category “Language teachers”

2010: Project “Light Me Up! – Language Lessons for Abroad”, KU TU Ltd.

2009: Project “ATTIC: Local Goes Global”, Infocenter EOOD



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- 2009:** Project “Equality in Difference”, Foreign Language School “Nikola Vaptsarov”
- 2008:** Project “SHOPLANG – The Shopping Language Game”, KU TU Ltd.
- 2008:** Project “Signs in the City”, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dobrich
- 2007:** Multimedia Course “Bulgarian for Foreigners”, Lettera Publishers
- 2007:** Studying Balkan Languages – Road to European Culture, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
- 2006:** The Magic of Melpomena – Supporting Foreign Language Learning, FELLS, Sofia
- 2004:** Listen and Touch: A basic English Course for the Visually Impaired, Euroinform Ltd.
- 2003:** “Multicultural dialogue”, 5th language school “Yoan Eksarh”, Varna
- 2003:** “Bridges for Education”, Foundation “English Club”
- 2003:** Lingua Consult TV Series, ECET (Language schools “Europe”)
- 2002:** The “PLUS” Module, Language school “Prestige”

The organisations which have received the Label award in Bulgaria include language schools, universities, public bodies, private companies and organisations, etc. Interesting is that the major part of the labelled initiatives deals with less widely used and taught European languages, providing innovative approaches and new methodologies for their promotion and accommodation in the process of language learning.

In 2012, HRDC launched a procedure for selection of one labelled initiative from Bulgaria which to be presented to the European Commission and upon approval to represent the country at the Label of the Labels ceremony held in Cyprus on 26-28 September 2012. The selected project was “Light Me Up! – Language Lessons for Abroad”.

6. Evaluation carried out by the NELLIP Bulgarian team

The European Language Label represents an important tool to assess and award quality language learning initiatives at national level. The Label aims to contribute to the implementation of the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning.

The European language policies aim to protect linguistic diversity and promote knowledge of languages. The most recent key documents on language learning are: *The Council’s Conclusions on Language Competences to Enhance Mobility* (2011), *Strategic framework for cooperation on education and training* (2009), *EU strategy for multilingualism* (2008), *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment* (2008), *Inventory of EU actions in the field of multilingualism* (2008), *Online consultation on multilingualism* (2007), *New framework strategy for multilingualism* (2005). From those key documents, it is possible to understand the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning.



The main aspects the current policies on language learning focus on are:

- the enhancement of quality of language learning
- evaluation of performance of language teaching
- teachers 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

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 (i.e. those mentioned above), the Bulgarian team of the NELLIP Network selected, in close cooperation with HRDC and promoters of labeled initiatives, relevant language learning initiatives among those that were awarded the European Language Label. Among all the awarded initiatives identified by the Bulgarian team of the NELLIP Network, 12 relevant Case Studies were selected and developed. The objectives and results of the selected case studies are consistent with the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning.

Among the mentioned current political priorities, the ones mostly referred to by the selected the case studies focus on the promotion of: new approaches to language teaching and learning, enhancement of the quality of language learning, promotion of multilingualism and promotion of less widely spoken languages. Those principles are also consistent with the annual priorities defined by the European Commission, with a specific reference to the ones for 2012.

In relation to the target group, the NELLIP team identified four different sectors of reference among the awarded projects:

- School Education,
- Higher Education,
- Adult Education
- Vocational Education and Training.

According to this further classification, the higher number of awarded projects concern two or more of the four categories, with a slight lead of the Adult Education sector, followed by the Higher Education, School Education and Vocational Education and Training sectors.

In regard to the linguistic aspect, 58% of the case studies selected from Bulgaria dealt with Bulgarian, while 50% dealt with English. The other target languages of the projects that were the object of case studies are: Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, German, Greek, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Romanian, Estonian, Swedish, Turkish and others. In some cases one and the same project was focused on more than one language.

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

7.1 Impact

The identified case studies revealed the motivation of the different organizations to apply for the European Language Label. The performed interviews showed what were the goals and expectations of the promoters in respect to their initiatives and how winning the award helped them in further disseminating the projects and exploiting their results. The most frequently stated reasons for applying for the European Language Label can be summarized as follows:

- to achieve greater sustainability of the results and further dissemination opportunities of the project and its outcomes
- to ensure larger visibility of the project idea, the developed products and the achieved results
- to increase the credibility of the institution and the project/product
- to ensure additional quality recognition of the project/product
- to bring the used methodologies into life by valorization and transfer of the results
- to lay grounds for further cooperation opportunities

With regard to the impact of the European Language Label on the awarded initiatives, the promoters pointed out that the Label contributed to the better visibility of their projects and created opportunities for sustainable dissemination. The most frequently pointed out benefits from the impact of the award on the initiatives according to the interviewed promoters could be summarized as follows:

- official recognition of the quality of the project and its outcomes
- better visibility of the initiative and the institution
- opportunity for creating synergies with other projects and new sustainable partnerships
- more credibility for the institution and the project
- wider use of the product
- sustainable dissemination of the project and better popularity
- recognition of the effectiveness of the used methods and materials and increase in the confidence in the initiative's outcomes.

Most of the project promoters, however, stated that their expectations in regard to the benefits from winning the award were only partially met. Reasons for this are found behind that fact the European Language Label award is still not that popular among the different organizations active in the field of language learning. A recommendation was directed towards increasing the popularity of the award and its meaning for a certain initiative and its outcomes.

7.2 Exploitation and Dissemination

With the purpose of spreading the information about the projects that were awarded the European language Label, the project promoters of the awarded projects put the Label logo on all the documents (brochures, publications, promotional leaflets) related to their project. Some of the project promoters also organized and participated in specific seminars and conferences with the purpose to inform about the project and the awarded Label.

8. Recommendations

The projects promoters of the 12 Bulgarian projects that were awarded the label and that were object of the case studies were asked to provide recommendations to future applicants for the European Language Label. The promoters said that in order to develop a quality language project that can successfully apply for the European Language Label, it is necessary to focus the presentation of their projects on the achieved results and impact and provide clear description and plans for ensuring sustainability of those results. A number of recommendations were provided, which can be summarized as follows:

- to provide a very clear and concise description of their projects with explicit focus on their strengths
- to emphasise on the potential for developing future initiatives which to ensure sustainability of the results
- to define clearly their target groups and direct their project at covering specific needs of those groups
- to rely on innovation and achieved impact
- to take into strong consideration the award criteria for the award, incorporate them in the implementation of their project and when applying for the Label to explain explicitly how it addresses them
- to provide a structured description on their projects with focus on the applicability of the products and their impact on the separate target groups

The main weakness of the European Language Label identified by the Bulgarian project promoters is the fact that the European Language Label is not well known in Bulgaria. For this reason, a better and wider communication campaign should be carried out to inform language learning providers about what the European Language Label is and what are the benefits related to its awarding. In order to do so, the case studies developed by the NELLIP network could be used in order to present best practices as far as the benefits of the European Language Label are concerned.

It is necessary to promote the visibility of the European Language Label among language learning providers and experts. It would be also important that the information about the European Language Label also includes a clear description of the benefits related to its awarding.

Based on the interviews performed with awarded project promoters the following recommendations could be directed towards the Bulgarian National Agency and the European Commission in order to improve the quality and significance of the European Language Label award:

- to provide a clear and visible information about the purpose of the European Language Label and the benefits of receiving it

- to popularize the Label award among language learning providers and organizations active in the field of language learning and motivate them to participate in the selection process. This way even if not awarded, a great amount of good practices would be shared and disseminated
- to open a forum for exchange of best practices and ideas and thus create networking and cooperation opportunities
- to reinforce the activities following the award of the European Language Label and thus boost the attractiveness of the award

9. Best Practices

Among all the awarded projects, some have been selected under the NELLIP network as Best Practices. The selected initiatives can be used as examples and 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.

The identified best practices have been selected based on the extent to which they address the quality criteria for the European Language Label, and in particular if they are successfully addressing the needs of the specific target groups, the quality of the developed products and achieved results, the innovation in the used methods and approaches, transferability of the project and the potential for sustaining its results in the long term.

10. Conclusions

In Bulgaria, the implementation of the European Language Label is delegated to the Human Resource and Development Centre (HRDC). The Centre is also responsible for the management of the actions launched for achievement of the European priorities and strategies on national level. HRDC initiates the European Language Label campaigns in Bulgaria, publishes the European and national priorities in the field of language learning, announces selection criteria for the Label, organizes and manages the call for tenders and the selection procedure, works in cooperation with external experts for assessment of the proposals and implements the award ceremonies.

Among the activities of the Centre is to carry out a promotional campaign for informing of and disseminating the opportunities offered by the European Language Label. In order to do so they publish information on their website and other public online sources accessible by language learning providers, organize seminars, fairs and conferences so as to promote the information about the Label.

A call for tenders for the European Language Label is published almost every year. The selection and awarding of the winning projects is carried out by HRDC in cooperation with external experts involved for the purposes of assessment of the proposals. A ceremony for awarding the winning initiatives is organized every year by HRDC.

For the first time the European Language Label in Bulgaria was awarded in 2002 and there have been 15 winning initiatives since (until 2012). The statistical data shows that Bulgarian is the main language which the labeled initiatives in Bulgaria have focused on, followed by English and quite a high number of other languages, mainly less widely used and taught.

During the first 10 years of European Language Label in Bulgaria, a major part of labeled initiatives fell on projects focused on developing language products and methodologies for adult education, followed by higher education, school education and vocational education and training.

In regard to quality criteria used for identifying the case studies from Bulgaria, the Bulgarian team of the NELLIP network has selected 12 case studies whose objectives are consistent with the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning. The perspective of the project promoters of those case studies has been gathered in order to provide more information on the applied methodologies.

The analysis of the case studies allowed to understand the motivations behind the applications for the European Language Label. Most of the project promoter decided to submit their application for the European Language Label in order to ensure a greater visibility for their projects, assure wider dissemination and sustainability for the achieved results, gain additional recognition of the quality of the developed products and open better opportunities for future collaborations.

The promoters of the labeled initiatives evaluate the impact of the European Language Label award on their projects rather positively, although some state that a wider awareness-raising campaign about the benefits from the Label is needed. Most of the promoters state that the Label contributed to the better visibility of their projects, sustainable dissemination and opportunities for creating synergies with other organizations active in the same field of activities. In addition, the official recognition acquired was often used by the project promoters as a quality label to demonstrate the value of the initiatives.

The main weakness of the European Language Label in Bulgaria is represented by the fact that it is not well known among organizations which are developing language good practices and which are potential beneficiaries of the award. It would also be important that the information about the European Language Label also includes a clear description of the benefits related to its awarding. In order to do so, the case studies developed by the NELLIP network could be used in order to present best practices as far as the benefits of the European Language Label are concerned.

Finally, in order to improve the implementation of the European Language Label in Bulgaria it would be necessary: to provide a clear and visible information about the purpose of the European Language Label and the benefits of receiving it, to popularize the Label award among language learning providers and organizations active in the field of language learning and motivate them to participate in the selection process, to open a forum for exchange of best practices and ideas and thus create networking and cooperation opportunities, to reinforce the activities following the award of the European Language Label and thus boost the attractiveness of the award.

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