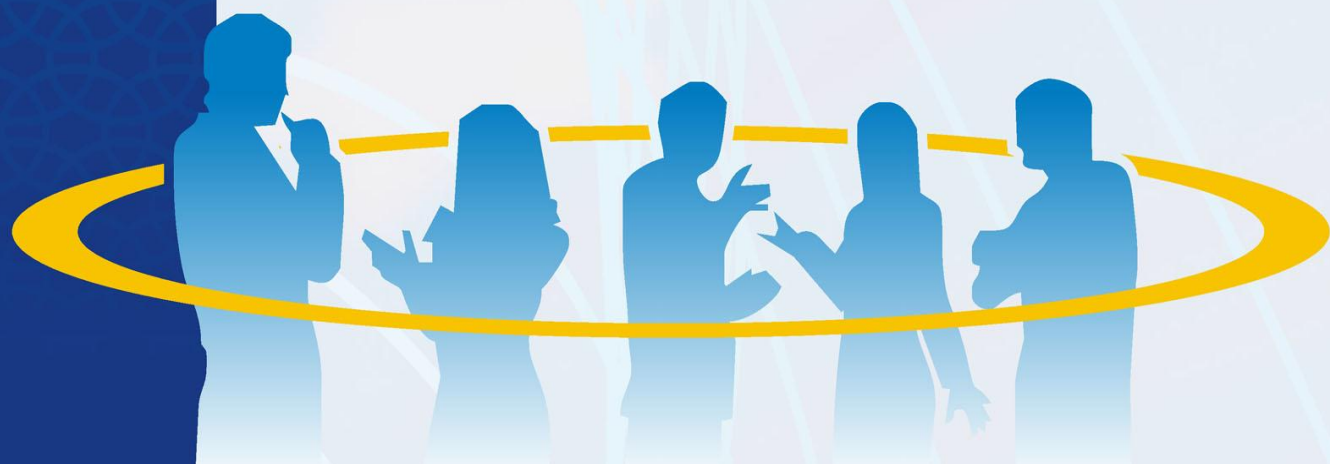




# **NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL**

**ICELAND**



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## ICELANDIC 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 (ELL) in Iceland and also to present the European framework for this reward procedure.

The European Language Labels have been awarded for the European language initiatives since 1998. According to Ms Androulla Vassiliou (European Commissioner for Education, Multilingualism and Youth), *year after year, the aims of the ELL have become more and more ambitious. The label now concerns every level of education and training, aims to highlight and reward innovative initiatives in the field of language teaching and learning in any phase of education and training, functions as a stimulus to exploit and disseminate the results of initiatives in the field and promotes public interest in improving language skills as well. The more ambitious goals of the ELL initiative are therefore perfectly in line with multilingualism becoming increasingly important* (European language label – empowering people, Limassol, 26-28.9.2012).

This report concentrates both on the Icelandic National Agency's policies and procedures of awarding the European Language Labels and on Icelandic initiatives that have been awarded by an ELL. The European Commission's annual guidelines show the main themes for language teaching and learning. The report is written by the Finnish project team of Omnia, participating in the NELLIP network, as each partner was given the task to introduce the ELL procedures in two countries. The research has been carried by interviews via e-mails and personal face to face discussions. This report has been proofread by a representative of the National Agency in Iceland and it can be found in English and in Icelandic.

### 2 The European Language Label in Italy

*Since 1998 European national agencies have awarded the European Language labels according to various themes.*

The ELL procedure is coordinated by the European Commission, but managed by the individual Member States, with national juries deciding on detailed criteria. The general criteria for winning an award are agreed at the European level, but individual countries can introduce their own priorities.

In Iceland, the implementation of the European Language Label and the development of specific actions, in accordance with the EU general strategies, are delegated to the National Agency of Lifelong Learning Programme, managed by the Grundtvig co-ordinator. It selects every other year, based on applications sent by the national initiatives, one initiative that receives a European Language Label. One initiative is awarded at a time, except in 1999 when there were three awarded initiatives. No individuals are awarded by an ELL in Iceland.

The activities to be carried out by the LLP National Agency in the framework of the European Language Label include:

- promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities and experiences offered by the European Language Label
- organization and publication of the call for tenders
- selection and awarding of the awarded initiative
- organization of the award ceremony

- monitoring and valorization of projects that were awarded the European Language Label (e.g. via newsletters, publications,
- promotion of participation in national event
- implementation of European databases of awarded projects.

### 3 The Label Campaigns

#### 3.1 Promotion

Among the above mentioned activities, the Icelandic LLP National Agency carries out the significant actions of promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities offered by the European Language Label. Different strategies have been used for this purpose:

- publication of bulletins informing about the ELL procedure
- newsletters and e-mailings aiming at informing about the ELL procedure
- advertisements on the LLP website and on the website of the Ministry of Education in Iceland
- publication of press releases aiming at presenting the ELL procedure and the awarded initiatives
- organization of the ELL ceremony (every second year) where the winner is introduced and delivered an ELL prize
- publication of the winner's project description and contact information in the European Commission's database (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)
- support to the ELL initiatives for getting more visibility and being able to disseminate the project outcomes and results in an efficient way.

#### 3.2 Calls for Tenders

The Icelandic National Agency launches every second year the call for tenders for the European Language Label. All educative target sectors are involved. The call for tenders provides information about the objectives of the Label and about the European priorities.

A jury that is nominated by the Ministry of Education makes the selection for the labeled initiative. There is one representative from the language teachers' association, one from the University of Iceland School of Education, one from a language centre. Foreign Experts are usually affiliated to the School of Education, University of Iceland. The applicants, after having sent their application for the ELL, are also interviewed by the jury.

The call for Tenders is normally promoted through:

- mailing lists
- the website of the National Agency and of the Ministry of Education
- newspapers

The priorities launched by the European Commission for the years 2010-2011 were *Language Learning in the Community* and *Language skills as a preparation for work*.



### 3.3 The Awarding Ceremony

The ELL awarding ceremony is arranged by the National Agency. The event takes place every second year on September, 26<sup>th</sup>, which is the day of Celebration of the Icelandic language. The event is often covered by the media and a news release is always sent to the newspapers to announce the winner and the winning project. The winner initiative is announced at the ceremony, and the representatives of the initiative are given the opportunity to introduce the project and its innovative approach and results. Often the winner writes also an article in the training institution's newsletter, or in some professional or local magazine.

## 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, 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
- multilingual classrooms

In relation to the first priority, *“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”<sup>1</sup>.*

In relation to the multilingual classrooms, *“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”<sup>2</sup>.* Selection criteria expect an awarded project to have the characteristics of being innovative and of following the criteria set by the European Commission.

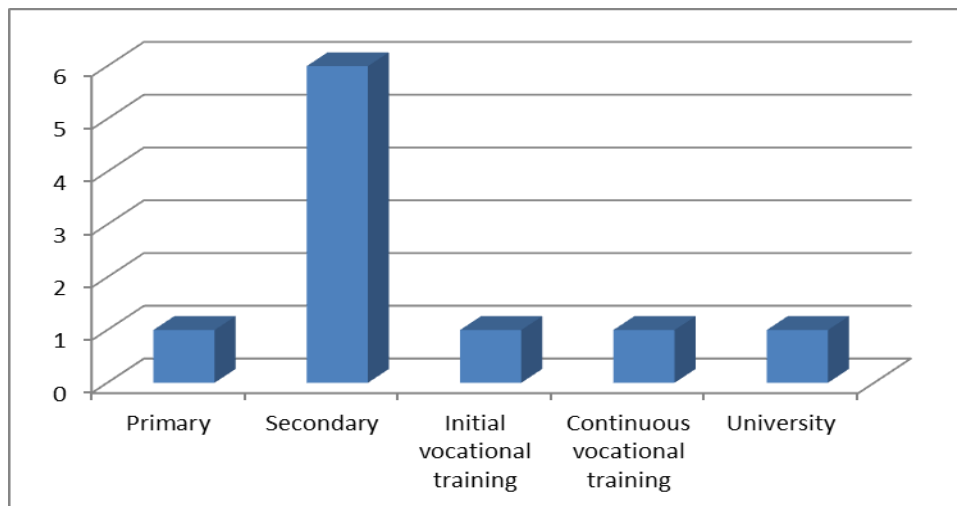
## 5 Awarding the European Language Label

During the first 12 years (1999-2011), 10 Icelandic projects have been awarded the European Language Label. The statistical data, collected by the author, offers a synthetic image about some strategic points: the educational sectors, the themes for which they have been awarded, the most studied languages.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2011), European Label awarded to innovative projects in language teaching and learning

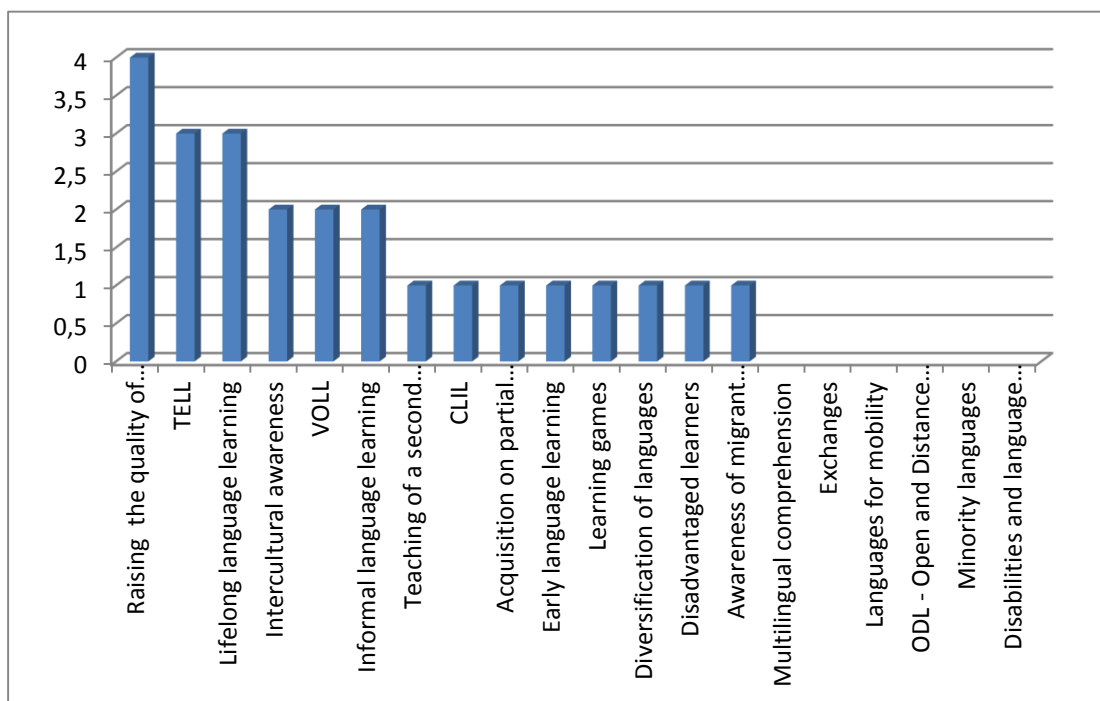
<sup>2</sup> Ibi

Educational sectors among the ELL initiatives:



Source: European Commission, Languages (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)

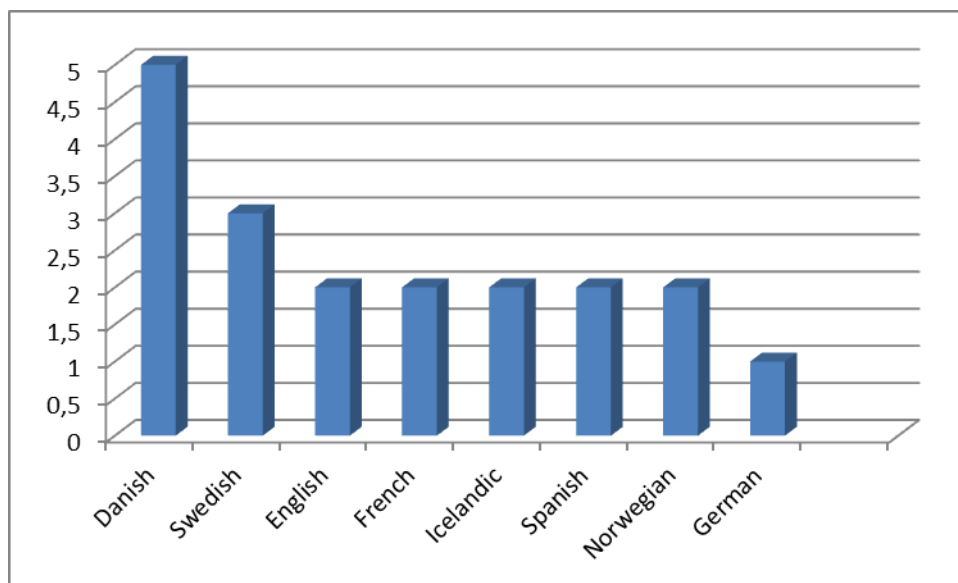
During the 12 years of ELL procedures, most of the initiatives awarded by an ELL were from the secondary (6) sector. The primary sector, the initial vocational training sector and the university sector were all targeted by one initiative, as the adult training sector, even though being an option, was not targeted by the ELL initiatives. The thematic area that was the most touched by the ELL initiatives in Iceland was the quality of language learning (4 initiatives).



Source: European Commission, Languages (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)

In this graphic the thematic areas of the ELL initiatives are covered. One must remember that each initiative may have selected three thematic areas maximum. In other words, the graphics cannot be interpreted by the number of awarded projects. However, the image shows clearly the most important thematic areas chosen by the training institutions for the development work, and also considered significant by the jury set by the Ministry of Education in Iceland during the last ten years.

The variety of languages is shown in the next figure.



Source: European Commission, Languages (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)

The main language that the ELL initiatives have targeted was Danish (appeared in 5 initiatives), followed by Swedish (3 initiatives) and then English, French, Icelandic, Spanish and Norwegian (each having 2 initiatives) and German (1 initiative).

## 6 Evaluation carried out by the NELLIP Italian 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. It aims at an important impact on the theme of promoting language learning initiatives on a European context since it has a network of partners and of associated partners covering a significant number of countries all over the Europe. For more information about the project and about its results: <http://nellip.pixel-online.org/index.php>.

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

European language policies aim to protect linguistic diversity and promote knowledge of languages. The most recent key documents on language learning are: *Key data on Teaching languages at School in Europe (2012)*, *First European Survey on Language Competences (2012)*, *Europeans and their languages (2012)*, *The Council's Conclusions on Language Competences to Enhance Mobility (2011)*, *Languages for Jobs, providing multilingual communication skills for the labor market (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 most recent publications were introduced to the public in Limassol at the Multilingualism in Europe conference in September, 2012.

The main aspects that 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 Finnish team of the NELLIP Network selected four case studies that presented best the innovative approaches or sustainable results. The staff of the National Agency in Iceland and of some of the labeled initiatives has provided the NELLIP project team with information about the selection procedure, about the criteria for the annual awards as well as about the recommendations of quality issues, among other things, for a successful project. The project coordinators have been interviewed either via e-mail or in face to face meetings.

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 highest number of awarded projects belongs to the secondary education sector, while the adult education sector did not have any initiatives in Iceland. The Danish language takes the lead among the Icelandic initiatives. Six initiatives are focusing on only one language, while the other four have more than one target language.

All initiatives have a special approach on teaching and learning languages, they respond to the European Commission's criteria and are effective on a national or local level.

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

### 7.1 Impact

The analysis of the case studies allowed to understand the initiatives' motivation for applying for the European Language Label. Most of the project promoters decided to submit their application to the European Language Label in order to:

- disseminate the project's theme and the results that were considered important and relevant
- share a good practice
- obtain national and European recognition for the results and good practices
- fulfill the dissemination strategies in a national and / or European network
- disseminate successful teaching methods and materials with good learning results
- ensure a greater visibility to the project

The leaders of the initiatives were also asked to analyze the impact of the European Language Label on the awarded projects.

The Language Label strengthened the feeling that the project team was doing the right things. The teachers in many initiatives have been active on other project and development work, too, and the ELL was a recognition for their work. It had an impact on motivation and on the comprehension of the contents of own work among the project actors. The significance of communication and cooperation was strengthened. There was seen interest for the project activities and results by other teachers and among other subjects to be taught.

An important fact was also that the language label, and thus the work done in the initiative, were also noticed locally. In some cases the number of invitations to events and to present the project was increased.

As a conclusion it can be considered that when receiving the European language label, the initiatives have gained more status on a national level. The label has had a special impact on the project members and on the teachers' motivation and they have been able to disseminate the best practices and outcomes to a wider audience. Perhaps the project coordinators could have more efforts to take all the benefits from the ELL for promoting and disseminating the outcomes and results of their projects.

However, there are different ways for exploiting the benefits and publicity that the ELL has brought to the initiatives. For some projects the recognition of the good work and interesting results has been enough, while other institutions have started new ways of cooperation and networks in Iceland but also in other countries after the ELL awards. made use of the opportunities to promote their best practices, results and outcomes.

### 7.2 Exploitation

Most of the project promoters produced a local press release or wrote an article to a local newspaper or to a professional magazine. Some of the project promoters also organized and participated in specific seminars and conferences with the purpose to inform about the project and the Label awarded. The initiative YRKJA, awarded in 2011, was also invited to the Multilingualism in Europe conference that was held in Limassol in September, 2012. However, the increase of motivation among the project team has been considered as the most significant result of the European Language Label. The ELL has also sometimes helped to integrate the project results in the everyday teaching activities or to further develop the methods, approaches and materials of the labeled initiative. These actions of integration and implementation can be considered as the most significant features when thinking of the sustainability of the previous project work.

## 8 Best Practices

YRKJA project has been also selected as an example of Best Practices by the NELLIP project team. 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.

Best Practices projects not only meet the quality criteria adopted in the awarding of the European Language Label but are “special” in terms of: successfully addressing the needs of specific target groups (e.g. migrant workers), quality actions carried out (diversity of languages on offer), quality of results achieved (teaching Chinese), sustainability of the project (online learning materials and new materials for new languages and new sectors), contribution in terms of innovation and originality, transferability of the project.

The reason to select this project is especially the approach of teaching Icelandic to the migrants – the careful planning of the training, follow up of the training results, reflection on the target group (Polish women living in Iceland), good ways of their integration into the society (and also into the working life) as well as the possibilities to transfer the methods to other target groups.

A detailed analysis of the selected Best Practices projects underlines that the main impact of the European Language Label on Language Learning initiatives is related to two facts: first of all it has contributed to the visibility of the projects and secondly it has strengthened the motivation of the project team by recognizing their successful work.

## 9 Recommendations

The project promoters of the Icelandic projects that were awarded the label were asked to provide recommendations to future applicants for the European Language Label.

The promoters of the Icelandic initiatives considered that one of the most important things is to find the right people to be involved in the project: motivation and enthusiasm are relevant for a successful project. The preparation for applying for ELL should be carefully structured and planned and the goal of the course should be clear from the beginning. It was also recommended to check out what has already been done and developed and have a look around the world. Language learning is a global action and people can learn from the others.

The promoters also wished to be able to exploit the award of the ELL initiatives thoroughly for dissemination, networking and further development.

## 10 Conclusions

The analysis of the selected Icelandic projects and of the case study demonstrates that most of the project promoters decided to submit their application to the European Language Label in order to obtain an official recognition for the work and for the results achieved. This has worked out in a right way by raising teachers’ motivation and trust on the fact that they are doing the right things. Other reasons are related to the willingness to disseminate project’s results and innovative approaches as well as share experiences. The findings were very similar in Finland and in Iceland, which both were the target countries of this survey.

The challenges of the ELL procedure are mainly related to the procedures after the award of the ELL. Perhaps more events or opportunities for dissemination and networking would help the project promoters to disseminate the best practices on a wider scale and with more colleagues on a national level. Could there also be the international cooperation and transfer of best practices as a next step?

## 11 Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Ms Ragnhildur Zoega, in Menntaáætlun ESB / LLP NA / LLP National Agency, who has been contributing with feedback and information to the writing of this report. Also the labeld project coordinators have given important information and feedback to this report as well as to the case studies.