European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Risk assessment using OiRA at European workplaces – a qualitative study

Comparative Report

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

OiRA

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Executive summary

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) often face significant challenges in conducting effective risk assessments (RAs) due to limited resources, time constraints, and a lack of expertise in occupational safety and health (OSH). Recognising this gap, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) launched the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) application in 2011. OiRA is a free-of-charge, online RA tool tailored to national and sector-specific contexts. It is structured around tasks and activities typical of specific sectors, making it accessible even to users without prior RA expertise.

A multi-country study was conducted, starting with France in 2022/2023 and followed by Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus in 2024 to explore how OiRA operates and is utilised across diverse national and contextual settings, focusing on how companies and OSH professionals use and evaluate OiRA's functionality in their daily work. The research analysed how companies in each country approached RA, focusing on factors that facilitate or hinder the adoption of OiRA. It also provided insights into end user experiences with OiRA and other RA methods, to compare the advantages and disadvantages of different methods and see how OiRA is doing within this comparison.

- **The OSH and OiRA landscape in the countries studied**

The four countries examined in this study each have unique approaches to RA. This diversity stems from each country's specific OSH environments and regulatory frameworks. These factors collectively shape how RA processes are organised, influencing whether and how OiRA is adopted in different national contexts.

National regulations significantly impact how RAs are conducted and who conducts them. In particular, in Lithuania, there is a legal requirement for RAs to be conducted by a person certified to do so, which potentially impacts companies' ability and willingness to perform RAs internally. In Slovenia, RAs must include specific documentation, such as a template recognised as a Safety Statement and a consultation record with workers or their representatives. Further, in each of the countries studied, differences could be found in terms of how often the RA is conducted in companies according to the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) data, with Slovenia exhibiting the highest overall rate in terms of companies conducting RAs regularly (91.8%), moderate rates in Lithuania and France (61.7% and 56.9%), and the lowest rate in Cyprus (50%). At the same time, in all countries, smaller enterprises are less likely to conduct regular RAs than larger companies. Further ESENER data confirm that Lithuanian and Slovenian enterprises rely significantly on external OSH experts to conduct RAs, depending on these professionals to fulfil legal obligations and compliance with OSH regulation. French companies, on the other hand, demonstrate a strong internal capacity to conduct RAs, with 73% of all companies doing so, even among smaller enterprises (5-9 employees, 67%).

In light of these considerations, the use of OiRA is intertwined with national contexts. Most importantly, in Slovenia and Lithuania, where external experts dominate RAs, OiRA is often used as part of external services. Also, in those countries, OiRA is complemented with (or complements) additional expertise and RA methods.

Overall, the main takeaway from the research is that OiRA effectively facilitates internally conducted RAs in smaller companies, making it a suitable and relevant option for MSEs. When comparing OiRA with other RA methods and approaches, OiRA emerges as a good option for MSEs, fulfilling its role as an entry point for these internal RAs, something for which other reported methods were not seen as capable. However, in addition to that, the use of OiRA appears to be flexible and adaptable, extending beyond conducting RAs (whether externally or internally) and reaching out beyond its original target group by also being used by medium and big enterprises as well as by external OSH services.

- **Motivations for using OiRA and its practical applications**

The ways in which companies use OiRA stem from some key factors identified by its users. It is always the employer's responsibility to have proper risk assessment done at the workplace. When deciding which approach and tool to employ — including OiRA — the primary consideration was which method best met the specific needs of the company. However, it is important to understand that the main driver for conducting RAs, as reported across all countries and by most interviewees, was legal compliance.

Therefore, while the RA methods chosen by the interviewees and their companies aimed to address particular company needs, the main motive was for the workplace to be OSH-compliant. Effectively, from the companies' point of view RAs must first and foremost satisfy legal requirements to avoid negative consequences during inspections or in the case of an accident. Therefore, the decision to use or not use OiRA was influenced by this need for legal compliance, even if it was not often explicitly discussed by its users in this concrete context.

The diversity in the decision-making process regarding which RA method to use reflected the varied characteristics of the study sample, which included companies of different sizes and sectors, interviewees performing various roles and tasks, and involving both internal and external OSH experts with differing levels of OSH proficiency. This led to variations in who made the decision about the RA method and the considerations influencing the choice of method to be used.

The study found that official backing and promotion of OiRA by public authorities enhanced its credibility and trustworthiness, making some companies more inclined to adopt it, especially in France and Lithuania. Simultaneously, a key factor was how well OiRA aligned with specific company requirements, especially concerning the complexity of the working environment. In larger workplaces that carried out multiple tasks and needed to deal with multiple hazards, companies decided whether OiRA could provide a comprehensive RA or cover a part of it, while in smaller workplaces, the decision was generally more straightforward, and OiRA was most often found to be well-suited to their needs. OiRA's sector-specific tools made it a relevant option, particularly for MSEs lacking other readily available, sector-specific tools. However, in some instances OiRA was used to assess only parts of the workplace, if there was no readily available sectoral tool. In cases were certain sectoral circumstances required additional technical measurements that OiRA could not provide, it influenced the choice of an RA method. For example, office work tools were used to assess only parts of the working environment, or combinations of different tools (e.g. for educational establishments, hairdressers and retail) were used for RA in a caregiving facility. Additionally, because OiRA is in most cases designed around sectoral tasks, it mostly does not provide specific tools covering certain assessments that interviewees found important or are required by law (e.g. psychosocial risks or manual handling).

Users also highlighted the fact that OiRA's free-of-charge nature was a significant factor, especially for enterprises with limited resources such as MSEs or public institutions, as it reduced the need for costly external service providers, which lowered the entry barriers for those entities. Lastly, familiarity with existing tools and methods influenced the decision-making process; being relatively new, OiRA had to offer incentives to encourage adoption over more established methods known to experts and authorities, even if this factor was not frequently directly noted by interviewees.

The study revealed two main ways of using OiRA, which were in many cases related to this overarching consideration: using it as a stand-alone approach, that is, as a method to conduct the RA across the whole workplace; and using OiRA in combination with other tools.

The study consistently found that OiRA is particularly well-suited for smaller workplaces. In these environments, companies often used OiRA independently because it sufficiently met their needs. When adopted as a stand-alone method for conducting RAs, OiRA frequently replaced previous approaches — such as checklists or Excel spreadsheets (France) — or took the place of external service providers (Lithuania). The shift to OiRA in these cases was driven by dissatisfaction with existing methods and concerns over costs. Specifically, some small companies chose to begin conducting RAs internally by using OiRA. Further, some of those smaller enterprises used OiRA on their own upon the recommendation of external experts, who then supported the assessment process with additional services and tasks, as reported in Slovenia.

OiRA as a stand-alone tool

In these instances — OiRA stands out as an exceptionally good option for MSEs; OiRA effectively fulfils its role as an entry point for conducting internal RAs, also because it is free of charge, a function for which other reported methods seemed to be less suited. That is because, unlike other tools, OiRA seem to have an educational dimension, guiding users step by step through the process of the full RA up to taking decisions on measures to be implemented. As a result, interviewees, including those performing RAs within their own workplaces and those conducting RAs for clients, recognised OiRA as especially relevant for those with fewer resources and less proficiency in OSH. Users appreciated its user-friendly

interface, clear layout and accessible language, which helped reduce barriers for those with limited OSH knowledge.

OiRA used in combination with other tools

Conversely, in Slovenia, Lithuania and Cyprus, mostly among larger enterprises, OiRA was more commonly used alongside other tools to perform more comprehensive assessments, or those perceived as such. This combined approach arose from various factors influencing the decision-making process. The main reported reasons for this were that OiRA was found to be less able to support larger, more complex working environments in which hazardous tasks are carried out. In such cases, other tools were more frequently used, as they were found to be more suitable. However, OiRA was used in a complementary way for double-checking results with other tools or for covering specific areas. This has to be considered in the context of the intended OiRA use, and its design, as large companies are not the targeted beneficiaries of OiRA.

Sometimes the reason for this complementary use was also related to questions about the legal validity of RAs carried out using OiRA (Slovenia, Lithuania) — that is, a perceived lack of clarity and clear communication on whether RA processes and documentation are in line and fully compliant with the national legislation. In these cases where other methods were perceived by the OSH experts as providing outputs that were recognised as proof of an RA, OiRA was not the obvious choice. The experts' familiarity with the other methods also played a role here, especially in Slovenia.

Nevertheless, even when not used independently, OiRA was regarded as an important tool in overall OSH management and as such was seen to have had a positive impact on workplace safety. In instances when it was found to be not fully suitable for conducting RAs at specific workplaces, it offered something other methods did not: it educated both experts and less proficient OSH service providers about relevant risks and gave them ideas on areas, risks and measures that they might not have considered before. In such instances, the way in which OiRA was used was quite different from its more 'traditional', stand-alone use. For example, OiRA served as an educational tool by allowing OSH experts to educate clients (employers) about workplace risks. Interviewees pointed out that, independent of the level of OSH proficiency, OiRA allowed its users to better understand what an RA entails, what needs to be covered by an assessment and the complexity of the issue of workplace risks. Companies and OSH professionals alike used OiRA to enhance their knowledge and noted that OiRA pointed them towards risks not previously considered. For example, it allowed them to 'rethink' their current approach and perspective, something that more rigid and especially offline methods were not able to facilitate.

Another key use of OiRA as a complementary tool was to cross-check its results with those of other RA methods, as noted by some interviewees (in Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus). By pointing out new risks not previously considered and linking risks with existing, up-to-date regulations, OiRA enabled its users to conduct a more thorough and legally compliant assessment. Here, for example, the outputs of other methods were checked with those produced by OiRA and supplemented as needed. OiRA was also used in cases where other resources had fallen short — here in the case of the OiRA COVID-19 tool, which was found to fill information gaps left by other methods or tools.

For those reasons, when used alongside other methods, OiRA's flexibility allowed companies to use it according to their needs, providing new knowledge and perspectives on risks through its interactive, online, sector- and sometimes even risk-specific design. Further, given how OiRA was used in practice, many users may engage with it not necessarily to complete a full RA but to learn, explore and supplement their existing knowledge. Therefore, any level of interaction with OiRA can add considerable value since even that partial use of OiRA can still provide significant benefits as users gain insights and information relevant to their particular working environments.

- **How OiRA was assessed**

Regardless of how or why OiRA was used, it was generally positively assessed. Interviewees praised its user-friendly design, noting the clear and accessible language and guidance it provides. Although some users experienced a learning curve when starting to work with OiRA, it was still widely recognised as simplifying the RA process, especially for those with limited experience in OSH. This group especially included individuals new to conducting internal RAs or employers in smaller companies. The structured

and straightforward approach of OiRA meant that it was particularly beneficial for its intended audience, whose needs were central to OiRA's design.

As noted above, OiRA was regarded for its educational value, which motivated its use even when completing a full RA was not the primary goal. Users found that it helped them learn about risks and mitigation measures. Especially in the case of those new to OSH, OiRA served as an invaluable resource that helped to increase the understanding of risk management. Even experienced users appreciated how it encouraged them to re-evaluate and enhance their existing approaches.

Additionally, OiRA was valued as a source of the most up-to-date information on legal requirements for compliant risk management, an advantage tied to its online format. Unlike other tools, and particularly offline checklists that are less adaptable, OiRA provided insights into current legislation. This was highly advantageous for OSH professionals, whether working internally or externally in or for companies, as it supported more thorough and compliant assessments. Its online nature also allowed it to respond quickly to emerging risks — here in particular, with the example of the COVID-19 pandemic — filling gaps left by less responsive, less agile and more traditional methods.

Furthermore, users perceived OiRA to be a flexible tool that could be adapted to their specific needs. They reported customising the tool by adding risks or measures as necessary (observed in France and Cyprus) and by skipping irrelevant modules (all countries). This flexibility enabled users to tailor assessments to their unique situation, demonstrating OiRA's adaptability to a wide range of RA requirements.

- **Ideas for further adaptation and development**

Despite these positive assessments, some areas for improvement were identified. While many issues were related to the reasons behind choosing particular RA methods, additional concerns emerged regarding how OiRA is used in practice. These concerns suggest opportunities for enhancing OiRA's functionality, promotion and user experience in order to better meet its diverse users' needs.

Users reported uncertainty about the purpose, structure and use of the OiRA-generated reports, which impacted their perception of OiRA's usefulness. Therefore, improving the clarity and user friendliness of these reports is of key importance.

Additionally, not all of OiRA's functionalities are enabled at the national level or are well known to users, limiting its wider adoption and the full use of its flexible features, such as collaborative functions and customisation of the content (such as adding risks and mitigation measures), as well as possibilities to take an existing RA as a basis for a new one. Promoting these functionalities may lead to more potential and current users assessing the tools as even more suitable for their particular companies and working environments.

Clarifying OiRA's legal status is also important, given that fulfilling legal obligations is a primary driver for conducting RAs. Therefore, clear communication on the status of OiRA's outputs in terms of legal compliance may encourage more companies to adopt OiRA.

Enhancing OiRA at national level by incorporating more modules or new tools for areas such as psychosocial risks or manual handling, keeping it updated with the latest legislation and expanding support for users might further increase its adoption.

Recognising that OiRA is used by a broader audience than initially anticipated, including external OSH experts, suggests its potential for wider application. Promoting features such as the OSH Service function, which facilitates collaboration between companies and external experts, as well as encouraging employee and employer involvement through collaborative and training features, could foster better engagement and ownership in the RA and risk management processes.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and rationale for the study

This report provides a comparative cross-national perspective as part of a broader pan-European study on the effectiveness of the use of the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) application in workplaces. The primary objective of this study was to contribute cross-country evidence on OiRA's functionality and understanding how the tool operates and is used across diverse national and contextual settings.

This report builds on and compares findings from four national studies. First, it includes insights from a qualitative study conducted in France (EU-OSHA, 2023), highlighting the tool's utility, flexibility and innovative applications by users. Second, it includes insights from the follow-up study, which included specific national research on OiRA in Cyprus, Slovenia and Lithuania (EU-OSHA, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c).

The study's overall aim was to deepen understanding of how OiRA is used compared to other risk assessment (RA) tools. It analysed how, in each country separately, company representatives and occupational safety and health (OSH) internal and external experts approached RA, focusing on how OiRA influenced the RA processes as well as the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using OiRA. Most importantly, the study examined how OiRA is used and what factors facilitate its adoption among establishments, providing insights into end users' experiences with this tool and other RA methodologies.

The study also includes information on each country's approach to developing and promoting OiRA and it gives feedback on strategies for communicating and promoting OiRA to MSEs (as well as OSH experts), considering the diverse contexts in which the tools are used.

Notably, each country-specific environment impacted how OiRA and other RA tools are used. These particularities impacted the recruitment of respondents and the final sample of interviewees, which is key to understanding the overall comparative perspective. Following this idea, a tailored approach had to be adopted for each country, as explained in section 1.3, OSH awareness and RA practice.

Findings from the studies aim to inform the overall perception of the implementation of RA processes in France, Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus, and how and for what reasons particular methodologies and tools are chosen, with a specific focus on technical aspects and how they impact the utility of OiRA tools for end users. The comparative perspective presented within this report also aims to provide a cross-national perspective on OiRA use and to give an idea about OiRA's diverse roles in the landscape of other RA approaches in Europe.

1.2 About OiRA

The OiRA application, launched by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) in 2011, aims to support stakeholders across EU Member States in developing user-friendly online RA tools tailored to national and sector-specific contexts. The OiRA generator is freely available to EU sectoral social dialogue partners and national authorities enabling them to create sector-specific tools. These tools are provided free of charge to micro and small enterprises (MSEs), facilitating their use through an interactive online platform.[1] Unlike traditional RA approaches focused on risks, OiRA tools are normally structured around tasks and activities typical of specific sectors, making them accessible even to users without RA expertise. The OiRA application guides users through the full RA, including prioritising risks and formulating an action plan and receiving a fully documented RA. This way, the tools are designed to help MSEs, many of which may not have previously conducted an RA systematically, to initiate and implement structured RA processes.

[1] In accordance with the European Commission recommendation, micro-enterprises are defined here as those with fewer than 10 employees (European Commission, 2003).

1.3 OSH awareness and RA practice

The organisation of risk management in the countries covered by this study varies significantly, as shown by the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) 2019 results (EU-OSHA, 2019). Each country exhibited different levels of systematic RAs across various company sizes. Additionally, there were varying levels of use of internal and external providers in these countries.

- In France, 56.9% of all companies declared that they conduct regular RAs. This percentage decreases to 48.1% for the smallest establishments with 5-9 employees, compared to only 89.8% for large French enterprises. At the same time, from the group of those that had carried out an RA, most companies reported to have been conducting their most recent RA either in the year of the survey (35.1%) or in the year previously (44.1%). Overall, when RAs are conducted, they are primarily carried out by internal staff, even in MSEs, with rates ranging from 67.1% to 74.4%, which is lower than in larger companies.
- In Lithuania, 61.7% of companies conduct RAs regularly. This percentage decreases to 47.1% for the smallest entities surveyed (5-9 employees), compared to only 85.5% in the largest enterprises. Of those that have carried out an RA, one-third reported conducting their most recent RA the year before the survey. Assessments in Lithuania are predominantly conducted by external providers, with 68.4% overall and as high as 69.5% for micro-enterprises.
- Slovenia shows a high ratio of companies conducting RAs regularly, with 91.8% overall. This rate remains high even for MSEs (87.9% to 93.3%). The most recent RA was reported to have been conducted in the year before the survey by 31.7%, followed by those conducted two years prior (18.8%). Moreover, RAs in Slovenia are predominantly carried out by external providers, with rates reaching 85.6% to 83.4% in MSEs.
- In Cyprus, half of the companies conduct RAs, while the other half do not. Among micro-enterprises (5-9 employees), only 40.5% do conduct RAs, the lowest percentage in the sampled countries. The most recent RAs, if conducted, were done either in the year of the survey or the year prior. Interestingly, Cyprus had a higher proportion of RAs conducted jointly by external and internal experts than other countries (19.6% of all companies). However, in the smallest companies, RAs were still primarily conducted by internal staff in slightly more than half of the cases (55.8%).

Overall, ESENER 2019 results show that MSEs face significant OSH management challenges (EU-OSHA, 2022). Consequently, to some extent, these dynamics were reflected in fieldwork and respondent recruitment. In Slovenia, the sample was based on external OSH experts, as most RAs are conducted via experts. It was difficult to identify companies conducting RAs internally and being available for an interview. However, the study managed to recruit three direct OiRA users. Consequently, the information on RAs in the study is primarily based on the perception of external OSH experts, who confirm overall low RA knowledge in companies and reliance on the services and expertise of external OSH experts.

In Lithuania, ESENER findings also suggest that RAs are primarily conducted by external providers. This was mirrored in the recruitment of the non-OiRA users in Lithuania. Despite the large sample of contacted enterprises and support from local market research companies, it was challenging to identify companies that used RA methods other than external OSH experts (or those that are doing any RA at all). The study included several interviews that were not included in the final sample because, despite initial verification of respondents, during in-depth interviews it became clear that they used the services of external OSH providers and had little understanding of the actual RA process that took place. For example, a recurring theme in these conversations was that the company had read the instructions and signed off on some documentation — indicating that company engagement in RA was minimal in such cases.

In Cyprus during fieldwork, the study requested services from a local market research company, which pre-scoped respondents to determine whether the fieldwork was feasible and recruit interviewees. Unfortunately, they found that respondents were largely unaware of RA requirements. Companies did not know what an RA was or whether they had completed one, and they often confused RA with general OSH certification/instructions. These findings align with anecdotal evidence from the Department of

Labour Inspection, which suggests that SMEs generally have a low level of awareness about their legal obligations regarding OSH, and this might explain their limited engagement in the study. Therefore, the study focused includes a big share of larger companies, all of them having experience with OiRA tools. However, the vast majority of companies combined RA using OiRA tools and other methods, mainly their internal approaches having been developed before using OiRA.

As mentioned above, while the overall RA completion rate is low in France compared to the European average, RAs are primarily conducted by internal staff, even in MSEs. This is also reflected in the study findings, which showcase richer approaches and RA methods used in small establishments compared to the other countries included in the study sample. This also enabled a bigger sample of direct OiRA users in the French study (EU-OSHA, 2023).

Overall, these **national specificities of OSH environments and RA practice impacted fieldwork and the scope of the study**. For interpretation of overall results, it further needs to be taken into account that companies interviewed for this research seem to represent a sample of companies that are more advanced in terms of OSH knowledge and practices than the average companies, since the study focus was on how RAs were carried out and how OiRA was used in this context. As such, all companies interviewed had actually conducted an RA (either internally or with external support).

2 Methodology

2.1 Key data collection methods

For all four countries — France, Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus — the data collection followed similar patterns:

- scoping interviews with relevant stakeholders involved in the national approach — the official national OiRA partner, trade unions and employers' organisations — to understand the role of and approach taken to OiRA within the specific OSH landscape in each country;
- desk research to complement the interview findings, especially in relation to regulatory requirements and OiRA user figures;
- in-depth interviews with direct OiRA users (France, Lithuania, Slovenia, Cyprus);
- in-depth interviews with users of other RA approaches (France, Lithuania);
- in-depth interviews with external OSH experts using OiRA (and other approaches) with their clients (France, Lithuania, Slovenia); and
- in Lithuania and Cyprus, the approach was completed by a small sample from the online survey, which was launched primarily for recruitment purposes but also provided an opportunity to gather limited quantitative and qualitative inputs.

The study used tailored interview guides for semi-structured interviews to gather findings. These guides were tailored in each country to accommodate different approaches. Researchers used different guides for interviews with OiRA users, users of other RA approaches and external OSH experts using OiRA. Remote and phone interviews were conducted in national languages and the interview write-ups were translated into English for data analysis purposes.

This comparative report draws on the findings from the national reports and direct findings from the interviews conducted in each country. It is based on a review of the national reports, aiming to find patterns and similarities. It is complemented by an analysis of the write-ups, following identified themes and patterns. To complement the analysis, researchers conducted cross-revisions of the write-ups separately to ensure no relevant themes or topics were omitted.

2.2 Recruitment and overview of sampling

The recruitment in each country included broad and varied activities to ensure that the highest numbers of OiRA users were reached. While this varied greatly in terms of the details and challenges encountered, the recruitment in each country included similar activities:

- Close cooperation with national OiRA partners, enabling dissemination of information about the study among their professional networks (all countries).
- Circulation of information about the study via OiRA newsletters (Lithuania, Cyprus, Slovenia).
- Sharing of information by means of an online recruitment survey on the communication channels of the national OiRA partners (all countries).
- In-person attendance at professional events (OiRA seminars, OSH conferences) to promote the study and recruit respondents (Lithuania, Cyprus, Slovenia).
- Close cooperation with national stakeholders — social partners and professional organisations. This included circulating information about the study among their members, sharing newsletters and supporting the research team with information on possible contact channels.
- Snowball sampling. The research team asked for recommendations from the interviewees concerning potential participants for the study.
- Cooperation with local research market companies to recruit respondents. These included both OiRA and non-OiRA users; respondents were offered a small compensation for participation in the study (France, Lithuania).

Table 1 summarises the interviews and the survey inputs conducted and used for the analysis in the comparative report. For each country, the table summarises the different groups of respondents. The findings for France are based on 24 interviews with direct OiRA users, 13 interviews with users of other RA approaches, and three intermediaries/external OSH experts that used OiRA (and other tools). The findings in Lithuania are based on 23 interviews/survey inputs with direct OiRA users and six interviews with users of other RA approaches. The findings in Slovenia are based on seven interviews with intermediary/external OSH experts and three direct OiRA users. Finally, the findings in Cyprus are based on 24 inputs from interviews and nine inputs from a survey with direct OiRA users.

Table 1. Summary of the interviews for France, Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus

Country	Type of respondent	Number of interviews	Comments
France	Direct OiRA users	24	n/a
France	Users of other RA approaches	13	
France	Intermediary/external OSH experts	3	
Lithuania	Direct OiRA users	23	6 micro and small companies 4 medium companies 7 large companies 6 external OSH experts This sample includes interviews and survey inputs

Country	Type of respondent	Number of interviews	Comments
Lithuania	Users of other RA approaches	6	3 small companies 3 medium companies
Slovenia	Intermediary/external OSH experts	7	n/a
Slovenia	Direct OiRA users	3	
Cyprus	Direct OiRA users	33	10 small companies 8 medium companies 15 large companies This sample includes interviews and survey inputs
Total		**108 respondents**	79 direct OiRA users 29 non-OiRA users

2.3 Categories and analysis

The comparative report aims to analyse varied national contexts, and the cross-national perspective creates a rich and complex environment to take into account. Therefore, several categories need to be considered when looking at the outputs of this research:

- **Varied national OSH environments and regulatory frameworks.** In Lithuania, the requirement to conduct RAs by competent persons impacts companies' ability and willingness to conduct an RA independently; in Slovenia, an RA needs specific documentation (Safety Statement and record of consultation with workers or their representatives), which influences the decision on the methods chosen for support. Similarly, in Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus, external OSH experts play a relevant role in the OSH environment, as mirrored in the study.
- General low coverage of RAs/low coverage of RAs conducted by companies internally.
- **Role of external OSH experts.** Slovenian OSH experts usually support companies in their RA, as evidenced by the fact that only 10% of employers in Slovenia use internal OSH services (EU-OSHA, 2022). Therefore, the externalisation of OSH services has become a defining feature of RA processes in Slovenia. Similarly, study findings indicate an important role of external OSH experts in Lithuania. In Lithuania, companies were found to conduct RAs independently more often than in Slovenia, but some parts of RAs were frequently contracted to external experts. Therefore, the study indicates that in Slovenia, OiRA tools were used by OSH external experts when working with clients, while in Lithuania, OiRA tools were complemented with other RA services provided by external OSH experts.
- The comparative report provides perspectives on the **different ways in which OiRA tools were used** to support RAs. For these reasons, the report divides the analysis to capture the dynamics of OiRA tools used as stand-alone tools in France and Lithuania (see section 5.1, OiRA as a stand-alone tool) and OiRA tools used to supplement other RA methods, as in Slovenia, Cyprus and Lithuania (see section 5.2, OiRA as a complementary tool).

- **Different sizes of companies using OiRA.** Although OiRA is intended to be used by micro and small companies, it became clear during the process of recruiting respondents for this research that all company sizes use OiRA. All company sizes were therefore included, also to maximise input on OiRA tools within the study framework considering the recruitment challenges. At the same time, this impacts the analysis since large companies have different needs and preferences than their smaller counterparts. Therefore, where relevant and appropriate, the report distinguishes company size and/or highlights the need to keep a specific focus on the requirements of MSEs.
- **Different length (and intensity) of experience with OiRA.** The sample includes companies that have only one experience in carrying out RA with OiRA, companies that recently started using OiRA and are in the process of developing their consolidated approach to RA, companies conducting RA using OiRA over a more extended period, those engaged in intense use over a short time, and companies that after completing one RA with OiRA decided not to continue with the tool. Therefore, the study presents an overview of diversified experiences with OiRA tools.
- **Differences in non-OiRA approaches.** The study presents varied RA methods/tools used in different countries and provides an overall comparative perspective (where possible) on tools identified; this is further developed in Chapter 6, Cross-national findings on RA and other tools.
- **Different timelines.** The study on the French OiRA tool was conducted between 2021 and 2022, while the follow-up study took place between 2023 and 2024.

3 Country-specific findings on OiRA

This chapter summarises key findings identified at the national level. It concentrates on the use of the OiRA tools, the motivation to use them, the people responsible for using them, the key practicalities of the OiRA tools used in each country and how the tools were assessed. Overall, the chapter aims to summarise key takeaways from each country, discussing France, Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus separately.

3.1 OiRA tools in France

OiRA's adoption

In France, between 2016 and 2024, 48 OiRA tools were published by the Institut National de Recherche et Sécurité (French Research and Safety Institute for the Prevention of Occupational Accidents and Diseases, INRS) in collaboration with the French Social Security Organisation. France presents the most significant number of OiRA users compared to other national partners, with more than half of all OiRA users coming from this country, having more than 155,000 users and more than 258,0000 RAs conducted by November 2024.[2]

Motivations for RA in French companies

The OiRA research was conducted in France in 2021/2022 and aimed to investigate the use of OiRA tools in France, providing insights into motivations to carry out RAs and how exactly the tools were used, as well as an overall assessment of the tools/application and possible improvements. The primary motivation of interviewed OiRA users to conduct an RA was **the need to comply with legal obligations in the area of OSH and the desire to ensure workers' safety, health and wellbeing**. Further, interviewed companies reported the need to reduce and avoid accidents at work, reduce absence levels, and increase the financial savings resulting from preventing accidents and ensuring higher productivity. On the other hand, the main reasons cited for why organisations in France do not carry out regular RAs are that the risks and hazards are already known (84% of establishments) and that there are no major problems (80%; EU-OSHA, 2019).

[2] Based on OiRA Metabase data.

- **Reasons for testing or using OiRA in France**

Companies in the sample became aware of OiRA through three key channels: the Internet, recommendations from OSH specialists, and word of mouth. OiRA was selected in most cases by the managers or the workers tasked with carrying out RAs. The managers made the decision alone, or when workers proposed it, management validated it. Respondents were attracted to OiRA and motivated to test it for different reasons. Many were related to the **tool's legitimacy and endorsement by the public authorities**, **which made OiRA trustworthy in the eyes of the respondents**. Other reasons related to the set-up of OiRA including the fact that it is **available for different sectors** and is **easy to use**. When deciding on the RA approach and tool, French companies using OiRA both online and offline prioritised simplicity and user friendliness as well as the fact that the tools were free of charge. Companies using other RA methods/tools were often driven by the requirement to use a software that was compatible with the existing management systems in the establishment.

- **Practicalities of OiRA use in French workplaces**

The process of completing an RA with OiRA varied among respondents, indicating the tool's flexibility. When OiRA was chosen as the RA method, the assessment process was reported to be often conducted by owners/managing directors (employers) and other people holding managerial positions, with most users completing OiRA on their own. Many users distinguished the process of collecting information for the RA and inserting collected data into the software; nevertheless, the time to complete OiRA varied significantly, as did the expectations about the anticipated time needed to complete the specific OiRA tool. Most companies completed their RA in several sessions, thus allowing them to collect any missing information or revisit the questionnaire several times. Almost half of the respondents said that they used the respective OiRA tool in chronological order. At the same time, other respondents decided to skip modules (if sections and subsections were found to be too general or not well adjusted to the company activity). Over half of the respondents said that they made modifications by adding new risks (e.g. specific to particular positions, not sectors, or the number of accidents that occurred).

Users reported different levels of involvement of workers in RA, encompassing direct and active involvement in the assessment (albeit not working with the tool), through to consulting workers about the risks in informal ways and asking them for feedback about completed OiRA reports. Generally, many users reported that **OiRA facilitated worker involvement in many ways**. Finally, many **companies reported using OiRA during labour inspection visits as proof of a completed RA**.

- **How OiRA was assessed by French users**

The key assets of OiRA, as reported by its users, include **simplicity and its intuitive nature, the usefulness of the action plan it produces and the fact that it gives the RA a good structure**. OiRA tools are considered a very useful and efficient, offering many strengths and clear added value. The tools are assessed as facilitating the learning about OSH and implementation of measures. None of the interviewed companies reported significant problems with using OiRA, only a few minor technical issues were mentioned. The general opinion was that its layout is clear, functional and user friendly. The tools were assessed as easy to navigate and as using easy-to-understand and accessible language.

OiRA was also appreciated as a tool that **helps raise awareness and strengthen a systematic approach to risk management**, especially among companies that did not have any RA approach before using OiRA. It was also highlighted that since OiRA can be implemented internally without the help of external services, this encourages better ownership of RA and contributes to internal cohesion and teamwork. Several companies appreciated that OiRA is well tailored to their needs and line of work, considering OiRA as a very practical tool. Linked to this, users also appreciated OiRA's structure, which they felt was conducive to a well-rounded RA process. They observed that thanks to OiRA, the RA within the company was more structured. A key reported advantage of OiRA is its **ability to create precise action plans that align well with identified risks**, exceeding respondents' expectations. Companies valued these plans for their role in preventing future accidents and found them motivating. OiRA users also valued the **sector-specific design and public authority backing**, which enhances legitimacy and aligns with current regulations. While certain companies appreciated the possibility to tailor OiRA tools

to their needs and circumstances, others highlighted that OiRA was sometimes too general. By contrast, some respondents commented that it is sometimes **too precise for a small company**.

On the other hand, companies using different RA tools than OiRA often appreciated the possibility of integration with human resources or financial systems. For them the cost of these tools was generally not a deciding factor. Adaptability to specific company needs was seen as key, with some opting for industry-specific tools or external OSH providers for specialised assessments. The legitimacy of RA results and access to expert support also played significant roles, with companies choosing tools and providers that offered guidance and assistance throughout the RA process.

One more difference emerged between the OiRA users and the non-OiRA users. It seems that those using OiRA had a generally better understanding of what a complete RA and management process encompasses, while some of the interviewees using other methods sometimes did not have such a clear concept of what an RA actually is.

Considering all this information, one of the main conclusions from the French research was that OiRA is actually very much targeted to the MSEs in France and is successful in supporting this target group in how they approach RA and OSH.

- **Ideas for improvement shared by French users**

Further, some ideas for improvements were shared by the French users, with detailed suggestions in relation to OiRA's functionalities and technical solutions. These included, for example, adding a new feature of indicating 'near accident', updating users on any changes in OSH regulations, sending reminders about when to implement measures, and providing two types of reports (for persons conducting RA and for workers). Several interviewees mentioned improvements in relation to action plans, which were found to be too long and too general, while still considered very useful. Additionally, a few interviewees noted that it would be beneficial to receive official certification of conducting an RA with OiRA, even though OiRA outputs were already considered a legally valid proof. Lastly, there was a request for more support so that users know that they are following the procedure correctly.

3.2 OiRA tools in Lithuania

- **OiRA's adoption**

The first OiRA tools were introduced in Lithuania in 2014, with the State Labour Inspectorate being the official OiRA partner responsible for developing the tools, providing user support and promoting OiRA. Since its inception, 24 tools have been developed, and as of August 2024, the total number of OiRA assessments reached 15,367.[3]

- **Motivations for RA in Lithuanian companies**

For the OiRA users interviewed, **compliance with the existing legal framework was noted as a main driver for conducting RAs**. It was further discussed that in some instances, RAs may be considered a mere paper exercise with a low impact on the actual safety of the workplace. Additionally, some interviewees pointed out that while the primary motivator is legal compliance, **genuine concern for workers' wellbeing is also important.**

- **Reasons for testing or using OiRA in Lithuania**

Reasons for using OiRA were quoted to be because it is **free of charge, comprehensive, exhaustive, innovative and online**. It was also chosen because it offers sector-specific tools that correlate with tasks performed at the workplace or because the person conducting the RA was already familiar with it. Overall, OiRA presented itself as an adequate option to meet company needs. The decision on which tool and method to use primarily falls to the expert (internal or external) responsible for conducting the RA. However, it is worth noting that the decision-making process was also collaborative in some cases, with employers taking the decision together with the OSH specialists.

[3] Based on OiRA Metabase data.

As some of the interviewees pointed out, OiRA was chosen because their workplaces decided to move away from their previous RA approach. Some interviewees found that externally conducted RAs were not tailored to their needs, of insufficient quality or too costly, which is why the decision was made to look for other ways through which they could conduct the RA, with OiRA presenting itself as the most suitable option. Here, OiRA was chosen as a method and tool that **supported enterprises in their evolution towards conducting RA themselves**.

In instances when OiRA was chosen, it often did not entirely replace other RA methods. Instead, it aligned with particular company needs. OiRA was frequently **combined with other methods** but the reasons for doing so varied. The most commonly indicated reason for using OiRA with other tools was the need to carry out technical measurements, which OiRA cannot support. These measurements were normally conducted by external services. This dependence on external expertise is, at least to an extent, related to the legal requirement for RAs in Lithuania.[4]

Further, some users **feared that OiRA would not be recognised as official proof of having carried out an RA**, either because it lacked those technical or physical assessments or because there was unclear communication on that from the State Labour Inspectorate. Additionally, some users added other methods to cover specific thematic areas — for example, a tool dedicated to psychosocial risks, as it was seen as important yet not included in OiRA. They also used OiRA alongside their existing RA processes to investigate and learn more about risks (especially through links with specific legislation provided in the OiRA tools) and validate the current assessment.

- **Practicalities of OiRA use in Lithuanian workplaces**

In terms of practical applications, the interviews highlighted the importance of OiRA's flexibility. For instance, users can adjust the time spent on OiRA assessments to fit the time they have available, allowing the RA process to better match their schedules, as they can start and go back to the assessment as they wish. The time spent on RA with OiRA ranged from as little as 1.5-2 hours for simpler assessments to several weeks or months for more complex environments, where OiRA was only one of the tools used. Most commonly, the assessment process took several days. Also, as was reported in other countries, some companies conducted OiRA RAs in stages rather than all at once — stopping and resuming when they needed to gather more information. Similarly, while many interviewees indicated that they used the OiRA module by module in chronological order to avoid missing anything, others skipped modules that were irrelevant to their workplace. Interestingly, in Lithuania no interviewee reported adding risks to the tool. There was also no single approach to how often RAs (using OiRA or not) were conducted. However, most interviewees said they used OiRA just once (for example, to test its suitability). In terms of worker involvement, workers were not directly included in the RA in small companies, and larger enterprises employed different methods for including workers' feedback in the assessment.

Overall, OiRA was appreciated, although users experienced some challenges. The assessment depended significantly on who used the tools and in what context (external versus internal experts, more versus less experienced OSH specialists, larger and complex versus small and less complex workplaces), as the same features were positively and negatively assessed.

- **How OiRA was assessed by Lithuanian users**

Generally, OiRA was valued for **being free of charge, and some interviewees saw it as supporting their transition from external to internal RAs**. Most users also found it easy to navigate and appreciated its flexibility, as showcased above. It was also appreciated for effectively linking risks to relevant legal documents and regulations, suggesting **its high educational value.** More specifically, OiRA enhanced the understanding of risks by pointing out risks not previously considered (especially for more experienced OSH experts) and guided users through assessments to ensure no risk was missed (less experienced OSH experts). As such, OiRA impacted workplace safety even if it was not used as the primary tool to produce the RAs. It was also **appreciated for its user friendliness and ease of navigation**, though some interviewees indicated a learning curve in using the tool.

[4] Legal Order No. A1-457/V-961 mandates that RAs be conducted or validated by a 'competent person' who possesses the knowledge and certification to conduct RAs (Ministry of Social Security and Labour and Ministry of Health, 2012).

The comprehensiveness of the content of the tools was an area where the same feature was assessed differently: while smaller, less complex companies found OiRA tools to be too detailed, larger companies reported they were not comprehensive enough, although this should be approached cautiously since those are not the intended beneficiaries of OiRA. Overall, OiRA was found to be not necessarily suitable for larger and more complex, hazardous workplaces but a good option for smaller enterprises carrying out less hazardous tasks, which is in line with the intended beneficiaries of OiRA.

Attitudes toward the **documents generated by OiRA at the end of assessments were mixed**. The action plans, for instance, were generally appreciated for their **clarity, ease of navigation and practical guidance**. Some interviewees reported implementing these action plans in practice, yet even when they were reported to not be adopted, they were still recognised as beneficial in raising OSH awareness and were used for educational purposes. In contrast, interviewees had more diverse opinions on the general report. While they appreciated the legal information in there, other aspects did not seem equally useful. Several noted that the report was often **unclear, contained inconsistencies, was confusing and sometimes repetitive**.

Overall, because OiRA was used alongside other RA tools, especially in more complex environments requiring additional measurements, interviewees were sceptical about whether OiRA is appropriate for their workplaces. It was also indicated that the respondents were unsure of the State Labour Inspectorate's formal stance on the validity of RAs conducted using OiRA. However, this scepticism was not connected to the requirement for RAs to be conducted by a 'competent person' but rather to a lack of official clarification and the presumption that OiRA questionnaires and reports do not include all the necessary measurements.

- **Ideas for improvement shared by Lithuanian users**

The interview analysis points to several possible areas for improvement in OiRA's more widespread use in Lithuania. Regarding **technical issues**, some users reported similar, repetitive questions, and the length of the questionnaire was found to be too cumbersome for some. Several users mentioned the need for **increased support and training**, which may help end users in the RA process with OiRA. While OiRA was reported to be mostly user friendly, interviewees indicated that insufficient training and support may pose a significant barrier to using OiRA effectively. This should be recognised within the limitations of the State Labour Inspectorate's resources, specifically regarding the level of support it can provide to each user. Additionally, interviews indicated that some users were **not aware of all OiRA features** (e.g. the possibility of copying previous assessments, the possibility to add one's own risks, the possibility to work jointly on one RA document with different log-in data).

On the other hand, it was noted that more sector-specific coverage but also the coverage of specific topics, risks or tasks would be appreciated. An idea for the coverage of one specific topic was the inclusion of psychosocial risks, as this was identified as lacking. Finally, it should be mentioned that the office work tool was highly appreciated by many interviewees.

3.3 OiRA tools in Slovenia

- **OiRA's adoption**

The first OiRA tools were introduced in Slovenia in 2014 and developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, the Labour Inspectorate, and various social partners, including trade unions and employers' associations. By the end of 2024, 22 tools have been published, with more than 7,200 assessments conducted.[5]

One key takeaway from the research carried out in Slovenia is the **prominent role of OSH external experts in RA** and in using OiRA specifically, which aligns with the statistics presented above. Therefore, recruitment resulted in the sample in the Slovenian research including insights from OSH external experts who use OiRA with their clients. Further, **OiRA was rarely used as a stand-alone tool**

[5] Based on OiRA Metabase data.

but rather in combination with other approaches. Specifically study findings indicate the popularity of two other methods (ZVD and AUVA; Stanković & Stanković, 2013), which are both offline checklists.

- **Reasons for testing or using OiRA in Slovenia**

In most cases, an external OSH expert was reported to select RA methods with each company, and in most cases they selected one method to carry out the main RA. Findings indicate that external OSH experts most often decided to use **OiRA as the tool of their choice in the case of small and medium companies with less complex working environments**. Further, factors such as overall user friendliness played a role in the decision making process. OiRA was selected for its user-friendly interface, step-by-step guidance, ability to involve employers in the process, and online format, making it more accessible to a broader audience. At the same time, when OSH external experts selected other methods as the primary tool for RA, they sometimes decided to use OiRA as an educational resource.

- **Practicalities of OiRA use in Slovenian workplaces**

Regarding the practicalities of the RA process, responses varied regarding who completed OiRA. In a few cases, the employer or a worker conducted the RA using OiRA. Specifically, some external experts indicated that OiRA was used collaboratively between OSH experts and employers, where the OSH expert guided the employer and took the lead, or the expert completed the questionnaire with the employer being present. In other instances, the experts conducted the RA for their clients, as some interviewees indicated that OiRA still requires expertise and that employers felt overwhelmed by the task. The use of OiRA as a stand-alone tool was either reported by the external experts who delivered RAs for their clients or supported them in conducting them themselves, or, in one instance, it was a company owner. In all those cases, OiRA was used in or for small companies with less hazardous working environments where specific sectoral OiRA tools were available.

In practice, RAs using OiRA followed the process indicated in other countries: the assessment typically took a few hours to a day, with most users following the chronological order, skipping irrelevant modules as needed. Additionally, two interviewees mentioned adding additional risks, highlighting OiRA's ability to be tailored to specific needs. There was no consistent approach to including workers in the process.

In instances where OiRA was used as one of the available tools, its role in complementing other methods was seen as **enhancing thoroughness, raising awareness, and ensuring compliance and appropriateness of the RA process** rather than delivering a full RA. This complementary use of OiRA was not limited to external providers but was also reported by three companies conducting RAs internally. The impact of OiRA's complementary use on awareness raising can be described as educational, sensitising users to OSH and RA issues and providing information about risks. Further, OiRA was frequently used as a checklist or validation tool for assessments conducted using other methods to ensure that no area was overlooked (e.g. results from both assessments were cross-checked and supplemented as needed). Additionally, the popularity of the OiRA COVID-19 tool among interviewees appears to be linked to the lack of other appropriate sources of information for assessing properly the new risks associated with the virus when the need arose, with OiRA filling this gap.

- **How OiRA was assessed by Slovenian users**

In general, OiRA was appreciated for providing guidance in the RA process and enhancing OSH knowledge — its educational value was most positively assessed. It was also regarded as user friendly, clear, understandable and intuitive. Further, OiRA was found to be especially agile and responsive in the case of emerging risks — particularly in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented an advantage in relation to more often used offline checklists. Lastly, the findings from the interviews suggest that OiRA can directly support companies and is suitable for MSEs — OiRA was found to be relevant for those enterprises as long as the working environment was not hazardous and sectoral OiRA tools were available. Additionally, OSH external experts also noted that they see **OiRA as a relevant tool for self-employed people and MSEs**, and they often reported that they encourage such companies to use OiRA.

Notably, the study included a very limited sample of direct OiRA users. Study findings based on this small sample do however suggest that **OiRA tools in Slovenia can directly support companies**. Some users highlighted a view that other offline methods were overly complex, especially for very small

companies. They also noted that OiRA provides better support in terms of identifying risks and measures, compared with other more complex measures, and users highlighted the fact that OiRA provides them with a possibility to move away from external services. These limited examples indicate that OiRA in Slovenia also does reach its originally intended target group (MSEs).

While the interviewees perceived OiRA mostly positively, some recognised challenges which pose an opportunity to further improve OiRA and the Slovenian approach to it and facilitate more widespread use of this tool in the country.

First, OiRA is understandably unable to cater to all the diverse needs of companies served by experts — for example, it cannot provide technical measurements. On the other hand, the tools are not generally meant and designed to serve the needs of bigger companies, such as covering diverse roles and areas of work.

Second, some interviewees indicated that OiRA outputs are not fully compliant with legislation. Specifically, OiRA is perceived to lack the legally required Safety Statement and record of consultation with workers or their representatives. The Occupational Safety and Health Act requires both (National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2011); in principle, a Safety Statement is a written document prepared after conducting an RA, and the act enumerates the elements that must be included. The legislation also requires the RA to be conducted by a qualified person who is certified to do so.

In Slovenia, using the OiRA tools could be **considered an additional effort beyond established ways of conducting risk assessments**, especially for external OSH experts, who statistically deliver most of the RAs in the country and are used to other approaches. The interviewees' reliance on additional tools alongside OiRA was driven by its recognised limitations.

- **Ideas for improvement shared by Slovenian users**

The possible areas of improvement, which users highlighted, revolve mainly around technical improvements and additional support. Some interviewees expressed concerns about documents produced by OiRA, including dissatisfaction with the reports being too long and the lack of clarity. Additionally, some interviewees pointed out that there were some English terms appearing in the descriptions and supporting materials. Finally, some interviewees also highlighted a certain redundancy of some aspects of the tools (parts were duplicated, questions seemed redundant and measures were repetitive). Other issues the external experts raised were the required OSH knowledge (especially regarding the language used) and ICT proficiency needed to benefit from OiRA fully. Lastly, the limited scope of questionnaires and proposed measures was noted.

3.4 OiRA tools in Cyprus

- **OiRA's adoption**

In Cyprus, OiRA was introduced in 2011, and 11 tools were available to users as of the end of September 2024. By September 2024, Cyprus had 6,100 users, who had conducted more than 12,000 RAs. The tool with the highest number of users and assessments was the COVID-19 OiRA tool, followed by the office work OiRA tool. Conversely, the tools with the fewest users and RAs were those for hairdressers and catering.[6]

- **Motivations for RA in Cypriot companies**

While interviewees considered legal compliance with safety and health at work laws as the primary motivation for conducting RA, **OSH compliance was also reported as a strategic investment, based on the recognition that poor OSH practices can lead to economic losses**. In general, the most cited challenges to risk management were budget constraints and an increasing number of responsibilities among staff members, which could sometimes result in reduced attention to OSH.

[6] Based on OiRA Metabase data.

- **Reasons for testing or using OiRA in Cyprus**

OiRA was, to some extent, supportive in addressing issues of budget constraints, especially for the public sector and SMEs. Their main motivation for using OiRA was that it is a free-of-charge tool, reducing the need to hire an external consultant and incur the associated costs of their services as well as allowing those companies to conduct RA internally — comparable to respondents' insights from Lithuania and France. On the other hand, for the larger enterprises interviewed, which typically performed RAs in-house or with the help of an external consultant, the primary motivation was not reducing costs. Instead, OiRA was primarily used as an information source to complement their RAs or as a verification tool to ensure their assessments' comprehensiveness, similar to Slovenia. In some cases, OiRA was also used for educational purposes, for example, by academics in postgraduate degrees related to OSH, or by OSH professionals who wanted to gain new insights into risk management.

- **Practicalities of OiRA use in Cypriot workplaces**

The approach to organising the RA process varied widely, depending on factors such as the enterprise's sector, facilities, equipment, job tasks and associated risks. Interviewees who used OiRA as their main RA tool reported that either the OSH professional or, in the cases of smaller establishments, the employer or a person who was a member of the internal OSH service conducted the RA using the OiRA tool. The approach to involving workers in RAs varied across organisations but generally involved a blend of formal and informal methods. Formal consultations were conducted with the safety committee, a body that the legal framework in Cyprus requires to be established in each establishment where 10 or more persons are regularly employed. However, alongside these consultations, informal consultations often also took place, facilitated by relationships of trust between OSH experts and staff members.

The time spent on completing OiRA depended on several factors: the user's experience, the processes followed to complete the RA, the tool itself, and the size and complexity of the workplace. As in other countries, the time spent on OiRA was shorter in small enterprises and longer for larger enterprises with several facilities, complex equipment and diverse job tasks. Also, similar to other countries, the process was paused and resumed when the users needed to retrieve information by visiting workplace premises or consulting their colleagues. OiRA was followed module by module, although some interviewees also indicated that they jumped between sections. All users interviewed, with the exception of one, reported not adding their own risks to the tool. Lastly, the active use of OiRA reports and action plans was reported to be limited, a finding that is likely to be linked to the composition of companies participating in the study, most of which primarily used OiRA as a tool to verify their RAs that were done with the support of other methods.

- **How OiRA was assessed by Cypriot users**

Overall, OiRA was found to **support companies in the public sector and SMEs in particular (although these were in the minority in the interviewed group), in conducting RAs in-house** and thus saving resources while achieving compliance with the national legislation. However, OiRA **did not appear to replace the need for an external consultant for larger enterprises** due to the complex and multifaceted nature of their facilities, activities and associated risks, which typically required specialist knowledge. Equally, **OiRA did not replace existing written assessments** in these enterprises. Instead, it was used to complement or verify their information.

OiRA was praised for its references to the relevant legislation, content quality, user friendliness and accessibility, and **free-of charge nature**. OiRA's reference to Cypriot safety and health legislation was consistently highlighted in the interviews as a key strength across all tools. In particular, several interviewees reported that the references to the relevant legislation helped them to ensure legal compliance, save time (because they did not need to search the relevant legislation), and make a stronger case to their employers for implementing specific safety and health measures. Interview data also indicated that OiRA tools were regarded as a comprehensive and reliable source for informing RAs: they were reported to cover a wide range of risks in detail, enhancing users' OSH knowledge and awareness and often highlighting issues that might have previously been overlooked. OiRA has also

been widely reported to be user friendly, enabling users with little to no prior knowledge of OSH to conduct an RA.

However, some issues were also perceived by the enterprises interviewed as deterring the use of OiRA. For example, compared to OiRA, other written assessment methods used especially in large enterprises — often in Word or Excel format — were reported to offer better customisation to the unique aspects of each workplace, including its specific facilities, activities and associated risks. These written assessments were also reported to provide more functionalities, such as helping OSH professionals to quickly locate a branch (e.g. with separate spreadsheets). Additionally, they were reported to use a colour-coded RA matrix based on the probability and severity of identified risks, which was regarded as the gold standard by OSH professionals interviewed as it allows a clear ranking of risks and, sequentially, the prioritisation of relevant actions to address them.

Another reported challenge was that OiRA's screening questions (risk statements) in some cases included unfamiliar jargon and therefore caused confusion. In addition, several interviewees highlighted as an issue the inability to mark some questions in the RA as not applicable to the user's workplace. Related to that, on some occasions, the questions posed in the RA requested either a yes or a no answer when the situation might have been more complex. The OiRA tools were also sometimes found to be somewhat repetitive, although it should be noted that this viewpoint was not shared by all interviewees, with some specifically appreciating the level of specificity. In general, while the assessment of OiRA was influenced by the type of user and their preferences, the interview data suggested that there might be room for further customising the tool and balancing the level of information that it generates for users, with some OSH professionals suggesting that OiRA tools could be more modular and offer the option to adapt the number as well as the specificity of their questions based on the user's experience or preferences.

- **Ideas for improvement shared by Cypriot users**

Suggested ideas for improvement included, firstly, clarifying whether the use of OiRA tools, including by non-OSH professionals such as the owners of MSEs or public sector officials, can be considered as sufficient proof of compliance with the national legislation during a workplace inspection. Secondly, several suggestions were made regarding the modification of OiRA features, including, for example, enabling tools to record the risks relating to different types of facilities (e.g. classrooms in a school) into one assessment (for example, by using a separate sheet for each classroom). Thirdly, there was an opinion that the OiRA option to host multiple users, for example, allowing content to be viewed by persons outside the organisation, was not very well known among interviewees and should be promoted further. This connects with the opportunity to provide users with more training and support, although this should be recognised within the resource limitations of the Department of Labour Inspection, which is responsible for OiRA in Cyprus.

4 Cross-national insights on the practicalities of using OiRA tools

This chapter provides a comparative perspective on how OiRA is used practically, looking into motivation, decision-making, who uses it and how, when and how often, and the final outcome of using OiRA to carry out an RA. A comparative perspective indicates that OiRA users work with tools differently, which may indicate that the tool is flexible across companies and countries.

The ways in which OiRA was used differed between the countries studied because of varying laws as well as different OSH cultures and systems. While OiRA is primarily intended and designed for MSEs, the recruitment process and the resulting search sample include enterprises of various sizes, which influenced the feedback on OiRA usage practices. Furthermore, a considerable proportion of the sample consists of external OSH service providers, reflecting both current regulations and historical and organisational differences across countries. These factors are essential to consider when drawing conclusions from the results obtained.

- **What are the motivations for using OiRA?**

The processes for choosing the specific RA method varied greatly across companies and countries. However, considering how and why an approach was chosen must be discussed in the context of overall motivations for conducting RAs, and potential study biases may also play a role.

First and foremost, it needs to be taken into account that all companies interviewed were, in one way or another, active in terms of OSH and RA. This makes this target group belonging to the better-performing companies in terms of OSH, not including any company that did not do an RA. It is important to keep this information in mind to understand that the results presented here are focusing on the ways RAs are carried out but not on the average approach companies take to OSH and RA in the countries covered.

In terms of motivation across countries, the primary motivator to conduct the RA was the **need to comply with legal obligations in OSH**, which is also in line with overall ESENER results (ESENER, 2019). This compliance was understood both as a minimal level required in the event of an inspection and as a means to avoid penalties in the case of a workplace accident. Less commonly, but still importantly, a genuine concern for workers' safety, health and wellbeing was mentioned. This concern was sometimes coupled with the recognition that accidents and worker absences are costly for companies.

The motivations to choose OiRA as the specific method differed considerably from one country to another, and even from one company to another. Why OiRA was used specifically depended greatly on the specificities of the OSH system in each of the countries, as well as the channels through which OiRA was promoted, including which of its features and capabilities were put forward. In general, four main motivations appeared in the study. OiRA was chosen because:

- it was backed by the national authorities (France, Lithuania);
- it is free of charge (all countries);
- it served the particular needs of the companies (e.g. validation of other methods, education, all countries);
- it was an attractive alternative to diverse previous approaches (also including external services) with which companies were unhappy (France, Lithuania, Slovenia); and
- it provided information that was not available elsewhere (COVID-19 tools, specifically in Slovenia and Cyprus).

Overall, the choice of a particular RA method or combination of methods was primarily dictated by workplace needs, including the size of the company, the complexity of activities, the number and types of tasks and roles, and the perceived hazards in the working environment. While OiRA was promoted by official partners across all the studied countries, **some confusion remained about the validity of OiRA's assessments during inspections**. Consequently, in three countries (France was the exception), a range of interviewed companies did not rely on OiRA only to comply with existing legislation. More often, the decision to choose OiRA was driven by a desire to secure more thorough, accurate and detailed assessments, even if not recognised as fulfilling all legal obligations for an assessment — for example, to provide validation of other methods used, deliver additional information, or educate themselves and the workforce about risks.

However, the motivation to secure legal compliance was the case for OiRA's main target group, micro and small enterprises with limited resources, as well as for public institutions, **where OiRA was seen as a good option** due to the fact that it was free of charge. This preference was especially relevant when compared to the use of external OSH provider services, which were either perceived as costly or had previously delivered assessments recognised as low quality. In those instances, OiRA was chosen as an RA tool to support companies in transitioning towards internally conducted assessments or to support companies to begin conducting RAs systematically. Nevertheless, those instances were limited in number in all countries except France, where the biggest group of MSEs was interviewed. On the other hand, when external OSH experts were tasked with providing an RA, they chose OiRA mainly for small enterprises with less hazardous environments, or when particular activities at the companies were aligned with the OiRA sectoral tools, and OiRA was found to be suitable for those particular tasks and roles.

- **Who makes the decision on the RA method, and who conducts the assessment?**

OiRA and other RA methods used alongside it **were primarily selected by the individuals responsible for conducting the assessments**. These included employers, managers, workers with OSH qualifications tasked with conducting the RA and external OSH service providers. As discussed above, their decisions were largely guided by the specific yet varied needs of the companies they served. Although the decision to use OiRA was typically made by a person tasked with OSH management without consulting others, there were instances where a more collaborative approach was employed. In France, for example, decisions sometimes involved consultations between managers or between managers and the employer, as well as discussions with workers. In other countries, interviewees did not report involving workers in the decision-making process. However, other forms of collaboration were noted. For instance, in Lithuania, some companies involved members from their organisation or department, management (e.g. if labour inspectors made a recommendation on OiRA), or made the decision jointly between the OSH specialist and the employer, where different pros and cons were discussed:

> *I heard about OiRA in one of the Labour Inspectorate seminars some time ago, so I decided to check it out. I used the test session once. I thought it would be quick, but once I started to dig deeper, I noticed that it takes hours if you really want to complete the process in depth. So, I decided to stop, consult with the director [of the school], and perhaps do it together to ensure that we analyse all the risks completely. It is important as well to create an actionable plan for the future because if we add something that we are not able to achieve due to budget constraints, the assessment won't help us.*
>
> **Internal OSH expert – deputy director for economic affairs, secondary level school, 'Education' OiRA tool**
>
> **Lithuania**

When delivering RAs, it is important to distinguish the roles involved. As previously discussed, OiRA was often used alongside other RA methods, meaning that **different individuals could be assigned to different aspects of the assessment**. For example, an internal OSH expert might conduct the RA with OiRA, while a separate external service provider might be responsible for technical or physical assessments. This approach was reported, for example, when working with machinery (where specialised knowledge was required) or in small companies.

For OiRA RAs specifically, the same individuals typically selected the method and conducted the assessment. However, similar to the decision-making process for selecting methods, there were some instances of a more collaborative approach. For example, in Slovenia, external experts reported conducting OiRA assessments in collaboration with employers. In these cases, the expert either led the assessment with the employer providing necessary inputs or supported the employer in filling out the questionnaire. Additionally, in one Lithuanian budgetary institution, the RA was conducted jointly by three deputy directors, each with different areas of expertise (occupational health surveillance, safe environment, sexual harassment, civil security and fire safety). **Nonetheless, in general, the OiRA RA was carried out by one person.**

Importantly, it should be noted that there were instances where only external experts delivering services for the companies had access to OiRA (Slovenia). This means that only they could edit and view the questionnaire, and employers did not have any or further interaction with the tool once the assessment was completed.

- **What does the OiRA RA process look like?**

There was no single way that OiRA RAs were conducted, as the sample included various individuals who carried out the assessments in the most suitable way. The entire process mainly depended on whether the company was small with similar roles or large and complex with different roles and whether

an internal or external OSH specialist performed the assessment. This led to some differences in how the process was carried out. However, these variations were more related to how each company operated and the personal preferences of the person conducting the RA rather than differences between countries.

The time required to complete an OiRA RA varied significantly. Here, as well, a distinction should be made. Because OiRA was often used alongside other RA methods, this made it difficult to separate the time spent specifically on OiRA from the overall RA process. Additionally, when RA is viewed as an integral part of OSH and risk management, it can become a continuous process without a clearly defined start and end. Furthermore, as discussed below, assessments using OiRA were sometimes paused and resumed later, extending the overall process. As a result, the RA process could take anything **from a few hours** for simpler approaches and smaller enterprises **to several weeks or months** for more complex and larger workplaces, where OiRA was also sometimes used to complement other methods, making it hard to define how long it actually took. Most commonly, however, RAs conducted using OiRA took users from several hours to several days.

As became apparent from the interviews, OiRA offers significant flexibility when filling out the questionnaire. The interviewees from different countries and companies reported that they usually follow the tool's logic, filling in the questionnaire chronologically. They noted that this is because they do not want to overlook anything important. Nonetheless, many also said that they skip modules that are irrelevant to specific operations undertaken by the enterprise — if a section does not apply to their company, users choose to omit it.

There was also a preference to **complete the questionnaire in one go**, though OiRA provides its users with the option to stop the assessment and return to it whenever it suits the user and as often as they need to. This option was often mentioned — in those cases, the users realised they did not possess complete information about the topic while conducting the assessment. They paused the assessment, gathered the necessary data (for example, by consulting management), and then resumed filling out the questionnaire accurately. This possibility was reported to make the assessment more thorough and better suited to the workplace's dynamic and the users' needs.

Further, not many users apart from French users reported including additional risks to the assessment, though OiRA gives its users such an option. In Lithuania no user reported using this feature and in Cyprus just one user. This was partially also due to OiRA being used as a complementary RA method, meaning that risks not added are presumably addressed through other methods. However, more recognition of such a feature could potentially counteract some doubts about OiRA's level of detail and comprehensiveness.

Although OiRA offers flexibility in completing the questionnaire, not all users were aware of these options, which made their experience more challenging. For instance, some users were unaware they could use previously completed assessments and build a new RA on them (Lithuania). This lack of knowledge sometimes made the process feel repetitive and burdensome, as users had to fill out the questionnaire multiple times, for example, when dealing with bigger companies having several locations. Lastly, while OiRA facilitates a collaborative approach to RA and encourages different actors to participate in the process, users in Cyprus, Slovenia and Lithuania were generally not aware that they could share the assessment by giving access to others to the RAs done by them. In France this feature did not exist at the time of the research.

Overall, increasing awareness of all the flexible features of OiRA by providing more targeted training and supporting materials could enhance user experience and promote more widespread use (see also Chapter 8, Conclusions and recommendations).

- **Are workers involved in the assessment?**

Overall, worker involvement in OiRA RAs varied, mainly based on the size of the company rather than where the company was based; France was however an exception here. Workers were reported to be involved in RAs and engaged either through formal channels, which were more common in larger workplaces, or through informal methods, especially in smaller enterprises. The results indicate that different companies and various OSH experts, including external experts, have varying perceptions of the importance of worker engagement in the RA process. While some enterprises (this relates

particularly to feedback from French companies) consider worker engagement to be highly important, others do not emphasise it as strongly. Generally, the degree of worker engagement seemed determined by the specific dynamics of each company, its size and the preferences of the person conducting the assessment. At the same time, **no company reported that workers had direct access to OiRA**.

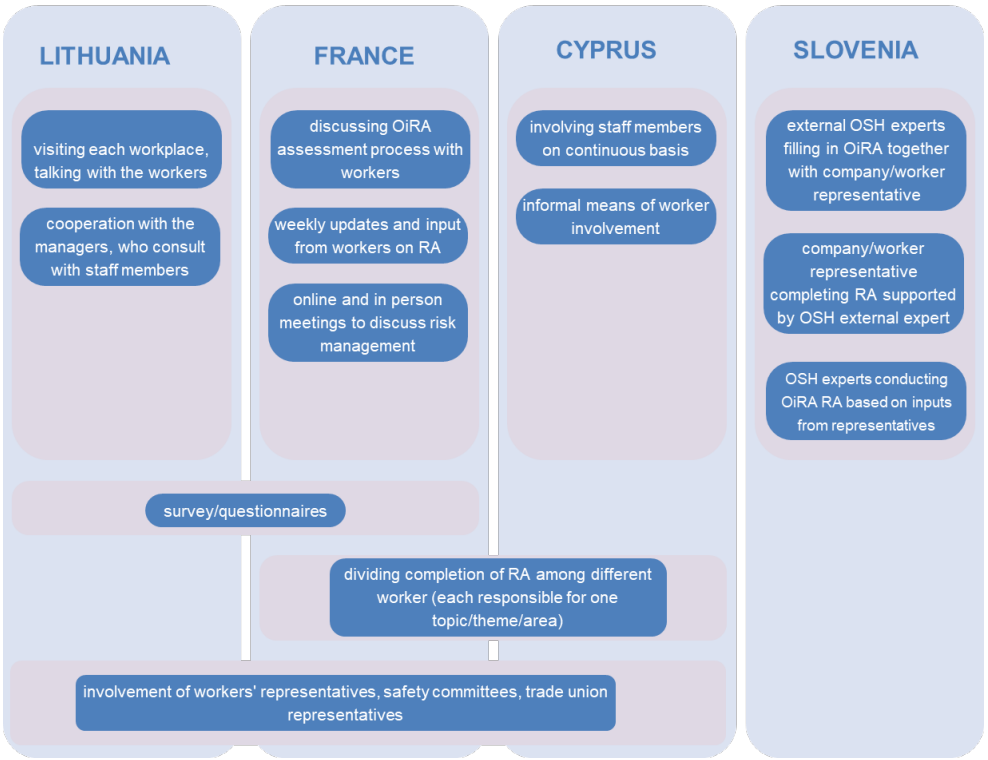
In smaller companies, feedback was often gathered informally or was not gathered at all (at least not in a structured and intentional manner). It was noted that, especially in MSEs, the employer or the person responsible for OSH — even when working with an external expert — claimed to have enough knowledge of working processes and saw no need to involve workers directly. Informal methods of consulting workers generally involved visiting worksites, talking with some or all workers (true for both internal and external OSH experts), or involving them in ongoing OSH management, which meant **there was no dedicated time to gather feedback on risks, as it was handled continuously**. This is in line with other research, which shows that worker engagement tends to be less formal and often less effective in smaller companies, suggesting that these findings are more related to company size than to the use of OiRA (EU-OSHA, 2016).

By contrast, more formalised channels were more common in large workplaces. These methods included:

- consultations and meetings with specific workplace bodies (e.g. safety committees in Cyprus and OSH committees in Lithuania);
- meetings with worker representatives (Lithuania); and
- surveys to collect workers' feedback (Lithuania).

There was no one-size-fits-all approach to engaging workers in the RA process. In some companies, workers' feedback was considered key; in others, it was gathered more informally and not systematically. Figure 1 summarises different methods for worker involvement in companies in the countries under study.

Figure 1. Examples of worker engagement methods across countries



Importantly, it seems that OiRA did not influence the level of worker involvement in Lithuania, Cyprus and Slovenia. It did, however, in France. There, **OiRA facilitated greater worker involvement in the RA process** by providing transparent access to relevant documents, such as the final report and action plan. In contrast to other methods used in France, which seemed to contribute to restricted access to the relevant documents, OiRA enabled workers to view and participate in the RA process in a more active way, yet not by engaging with OiRA directly online. A notable example came from one business, where each worker was assigned specific tasks to prevent a single individual from overseeing the entire RA. Depending on the task assigned, workers identified risks and communicated them in meetings. As one French interviewee emphasised: 'It is a tool that aims to protect them [the workers], so we must be able to communicate the necessary information to them.' Overall, the French workplaces reported on the **deeper engagement of the workers in the OSH management**, a part of which was their more prominent participation in the RA processes. This engagement continued further, as will be discussed in the section below.

- **Working with reports and action plans**

Opinions about OiRA outputs were consistent across Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus: action plans were mostly praised for being easy to understand, actionable and valuable, while reports were often viewed as more difficult to work with. In France both outputs were appreciated. For clarity, it needs to be highlighted here that the French general report already had a different format at the moment of conducting the research.

OiRA's action plans received favourable feedback from companies of all sizes and sectors, and both internal and external OSH service providers, pointing above all to their clarity and practicality.

First, in terms of formatting, users appreciated the fact that they were **detailed and easy to navigate**, which provided clear guidance on addressing identified risks. Further, the ability to download, print and share action plans facilitated their active use at workplaces. This also helped to increase accountability and transparency (see below).

Secondly, in terms of the action plan's contents, users mostly commended them **for offering effective measures** to address identified risks and for enhancing their knowledge of OSH management. The **appropriateness of the proposed measures was generally praised** — even more seasoned OSH experts found them mostly well-tailored. Although action plans may not have been fully implemented (see below), they were still considered to be valuable resources because of the appropriateness of the proposed measures, which helped to improve workplace safety by providing information about the measures. Occasionally, the measures were referred to as being too cost-intensive or complex, especially when referring to changes related to the premises/building. Particularly in France, the flexibility of the contents of the action plan was reported to be one of its strengths, allowing companies to tailor the recommendations to their specific needs. Those users especially appreciated the ability to fine-tune action plans by adding or modifying measures.

Simultaneously, several **aspects of the action plans were regarded as in need of improvement,** while **acknowledging the generally positive perception of them**. Although there were some sporadic comments on the action plan being too lengthy and too technical in its language, the more common feedback in Slovenia, Lithuania and Cyprus was that it is too general and the proposed measures are **not specific enough**, especially for more hazardous environments. It was pointed out that when users require more specific guidance or have more specific questions, the action plans were thought to be not sufficiently nuanced. As some users pointed out, this may be due to the binary nature of the questions in the questionnaire, which does not leave much space for nuance. Here, however, it has to be coupled with the general perception that OiRA is not particularly suitable for more complex and hazardous working environments.

While the action plans were mostly positively assessed — both in terms of structure and contents — they were **not universally reported as executed in Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus**. The issue here could be severalfold, with recognition given to the fact that the sample included a relatively high number of external service providers. While they reported sharing the OiRA outputs with their clients (sometimes tailoring them to highlight the most important parts or to avoid OSH jargon), they were not normally engaged in the implementation of the measures and therefore not able to provide information on how

the action plans were used in practice. However, a few external providers noted that they generally expected that there would not be many follow-up activities based on the delivered action plan.

Further, larger companies were more apprehensive about implementing the action plan in its entirety. The reasons for this were similar and reported in all countries apart from France. Mainly, this was linked to using OiRA to supplement other methods (see also section 6, *Cross-national findings on RA and other tools*, and section 5.2, *OiRA as a complementary tool*). Therefore, recommendations from other tools and OiRA guided the measures implemented, and therefore the OiRA action plan did not give a complete overview on its own.

Nevertheless, many companies — especially smaller ones, those that conducted OiRA RAs internally and companies in France — **actively implemented the action plans**. They did so, for example, by:

- assigning responsibilities to different team members; and
- integrating the recommended measures into their daily operations.

Action plans were therefore used to divide tasks and **monitor progress** or were **shared and discussed during regular round-table meetings** within the company. For example, one of the French companies that was mentioned in the section above follows the same process with the implementation of measures as with risk identification — each worker was in charge of a given measure from the action plan, so that not one person was responsible for all the changes.

Further, action plans were reported, especially in Lithuania and France, to increase the transparency of the RA process and OSH management altogether. By printing them or sharing them with workers and management, they facilitated the improvement of workplace safety, as making them public and displaying them encouraged the progress and ownership of the RA:

> *Seeing the action plan displayed, visualising it and seeing the progress is much more motivating for the whole team.*
>
> **Manager, optician sector**
>
> France

Overall, France was the country in which the study findings indicated a more widespread use of action plans, providing further insights into the process of implementing measures. Companies in France highlighted that some measures are harder to implement than others. While some require smaller, simple and straightforward changes, others are more difficult because they involve costs or require additional resources, such as training, which is challenging for smaller enterprises. Additionally, companies noted that prioritisation is sometimes necessary, addressing issues related to worker safety first, while those related to work organisation are not always given priority.

While action plans were universally positively assessed, **reports received more critical user feedback from users in Lithuania, Cyprus and Slovenia**. While user experiences with reports were diverse, some overarching points for improvement were raised. These can be summarised as a perceived lack of clarity and purpose of this output.

The biggest challenge, generally speaking, was that many users did not find the reports clear or useful and they reported that they were confused by them. The issues encountered can be summarised as such:

- the reports included confusing and repetitive questions, making them challenging to use;
- they were not well designed and unclear, often resembling a long list of questions that were difficult to understand;
- they were too lengthy, making them harder to comprehend and use;
- they used language that was hard for someone without enough OSH proficiency to understand; and

- the difference between the different kinds of outputs offered was not clear to the users.
- As one interviewee pointed out:

> *Although the appearance [lay-out] is adequate, the printouts are not good. As a brand-new OSH professional with little experience in this field, I got a little lost in the extensive printouts. I didn't quite get a sense of what exactly is printed on which printouts or why; for example, the action plan is not displayed in the full report.*
>
> **Internal OSH expert, owner of small fire safety company**
>
> Slovenia

- Considering this lack of clarity, **users were unsure what to do with the general report** — some questioned whether they could show it to management since they felt they were very lengthy and technical. Further, their format was reported to be confusing — when perceived as a long list of repetitive questions, users were uncertain how to use them in practice and questioned their purpose.
- The formatting and purpose of the report was an especially pressing issue, considering that in Slovenia and Lithuania some interviewees **raised the question of the validity of OiRA reports in cases of inspection**, as they were unsure whether OiRA outputs are recognised as legally compliant by the labour inspection authorities. In both of these countries, as well as in Cyprus, the reports were largely not mentioned as being used (or expected to be used) in cases of inspection. This was, however, not the case in France, where the authorities' endorsement supported companies' perception of OiRA outputs as a valid RA confirmation.

Although reports received some criticism, not all feedback was negative across the countries studied. The **reports were found to be useful in specific aspects**; however, the nature of their usefulness varied by country. Feedback from Slovenia, Lithuania and Cyprus differed from that from France, highlighting unique strengths and areas for improvement in each national context.

In those first three countries, the report was perceived to be useful by its users in terms of **linking the risks with the relevant legislation**. In this capacity, reports also served as educational tools, improving users' understanding of OSH management, particularly by providing detailed explanations and linking risks to legal standards (see *Source of legislative information* in section 5.2).

Interestingly, as some interviewees stated, the links with legislation increased the validity of RAs, which could be used as proof that something should be improved:

> *If I say that we have to fix one area and he [the manager] doesn't believe me, I can just quote the legal act from OiRA and say that we have to fix it by law.*
>
> **Internal OSH expert, a public agency under the Ministry**
>
> Lithuania

In France, however, **OiRA reports were employed in various capacities**, functioning more as 'living documents' compared with the practice in other countries where their purpose was sometimes unclear. French companies, for example, discussed the reports with workers to identify improvements for mitigating workplace risks. Additionally, the reports were used during awareness training sessions, were stored for internal reviews, and included in presentations or printed and distributed to workers not working on the premises, such as drivers.

- Finally, it should be mentioned that by the time this research report was written, EU-OSHA had already addressed the issue with the confusing general overall report, and a new format is available to end users as soon as a decision is taken at the national level to enable this format. This report format is based on the French approach, which had already addressed several issues with the report some years ago. Consequently, the results and feedback from the French qualitative OiRA study (EU-OSHA, 2023), as summarised here, give much more positive results on this aspect.

5 Cross-national insights on ways that OiRA tools are used

A cross-national, comparative perspective provides an overview of how OiRA is used. The most prominent approaches show how OiRA is used as the single tool for RA and the situations when OiRA is used together with other tools. Findings from France, Lithuania and Slovenia present examples of using OiRA as the primary, single method for RA, which is further described in section 5.1, OiRA as a stand-alone tool. The study also investigated instances when OiRA was used with other tools in Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus. These instances are elaborated on in section 5.2, OiRA as a complementary tool.

Further, other factors impact the way OiRA tools are used. In section 5.3, the report discusses differences in OiRA use in small and medium enterprises and large companies. Since different company sizes have varied RA needs, it impacts the way OiRA tools suit their needs. Another factor impacting how OiRA is used is the users' OSH awareness. Therefore, the internal and external OSH experts stand out as a particular group of users, which is presented in section 5.4, Role of internal and external OSH experts in OiRA use. Overall, the chapter on how OiRA is used finished with the key takeaways on varied ways of using OiRA summarised in section 5.5, Key insights on diversified use of OiRA.

5.1 OiRA as a stand-alone tool

The key finding from the study indicates that OiRA is used in different ways. The first type of use is when companies use OiRA as the primary tool. Such situations were recorded in France, Lithuania, Slovenia and, to a lesser extent, in **Cyprus**.

In France, where the biggest number of MSEs were recruited for interviews, most users used OiRA as a primary tool. Most of these companies prior to OiRA used some simple RA methods (checklists, Excel) or had no RA approach in place. These companies were motivated to try OiRA tools by public authorities' endorsement of OiRA. They valued OiRA tools as simple and intuitive, with good risk identification and adequate measures. Notably, in France, most companies saw RA with OiRA as sufficient proof of RA for inspections, and two companies used RA with OiRA effectively during inspection visits in their establishments.

In Slovenia, external OSH experts used OiRA tools as stand-alone tools only for self-employed clients and for micro and small companies with uncomplicated working environments. For the direct OiRA users in Slovenia, in two cases, OiRA was used as the primary tool as the alternative to their existing approaches.

In Lithuania, users who decided to use OiRA as the stand-alone tool were small and medium companies or companies with less complex working environments. They found OiRA tools adequate for their needs. They encountered OiRA as 'modern', 'structured' and 'efficient', in contrast to the previous approaches/methods they had tried, which were seen as 'shallow and superficial'.

In Cyprus, a few companies used OiRA as a stand-alone tool. That was the case with one establishment, which previously used checklists and was overwhelmed by the amount of different information on OSH and RA given in the checklists. They selected the OiRA tool, which provided them with a clear framework for RA, had enough details for their needs and included relevant links to legislation. Another OiRA user from public administration used OiRA as a stand-alone tool, as it was free of charge. Another stand-alone user, a retail shop, decided to complete the OiRA RA after a visit from the labour inspection to comply with minimum legal requirements.

Notably, some users in Cyprus used OiRA COVID-19 as a stand-alone tool to navigate RA during the pandemic but already had some pre-established internal approach considering their general RA. They later incorporated the OiRA elements into their approach and also turned to tools relevant to their sectors to incorporate elements from OiRA sectoral RA into their internal RA approach. Overall, in Cyprus there was no clear pattern of how OiRA was used as stand-alone tool.

Overall, the study found that OiRA, as a stand-alone tool, was **seen as a suitable and adequate option for MSEs, enabling them to complete RAs independently**. Both internal and external OSH service providers **regarded OiRA as an effective stand-alone method**, particularly for simpler work environments, provided certain conditions are met. Additionally, findings from Cyprus and Lithuania indicate that public sector establishments (regardless of their size) are motivated to use OiRA as a primary tool due to budgetary constraints.

Considering the use of OiRA as a stand-alone tool, there are several aspects most commonly identified in the study. The structures at the workplace should be simple, ideally a small or micro-enterprise, with tasks that are not overly diverse or hazardous. In such settings, OiRA is adequate on its own because the assessment process is more straightforward and does not require multiple evaluations. Additionally, in less hazardous environments, the assessment is more likely not to include additional measurements (such as noise, vibrations, lighting or chemical exposure) and can be conducted by someone with limited OSH expertise (such as an employer or staff member).

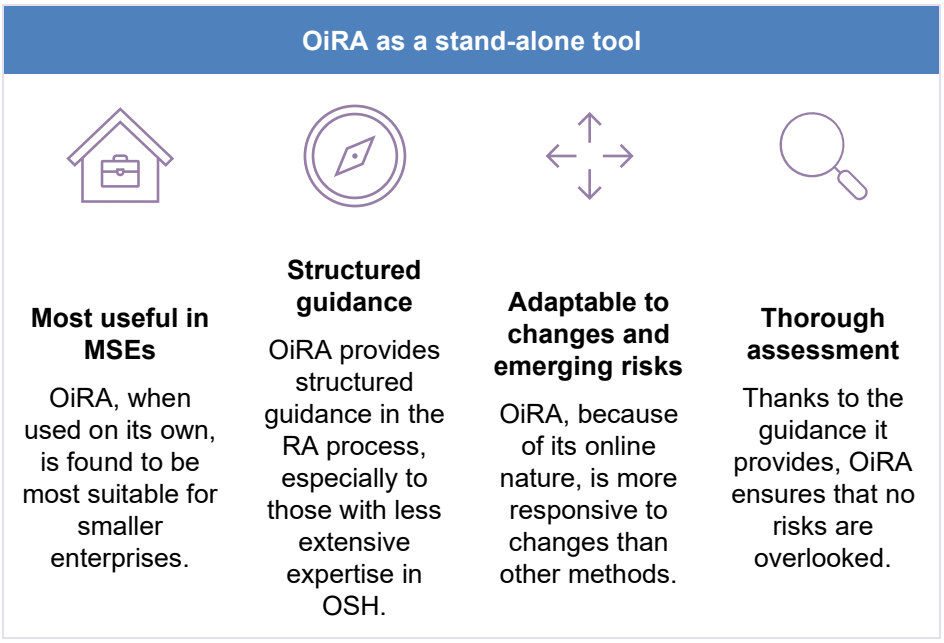
Secondly, understandably, a **dedicated OiRA tool must be tailored to the specific sector in which the company operates**. While there were examples where companies creatively combined parts of different tools as needed, OiRA was generally chosen as a stand-alone method when a sector-specific tool was available and recognised as suitable for the particular environment. If no such tool was found, companies typically sought alternative methods.

The practical application of OiRA as a stand-alone method was similar to its use alongside other tools. The process of who filled out the questionnaire and how it was completed did not differ significantly.

As already stated, OiRA, when used on its own, was universally declared to be especially useful and suitable for MSEs, which was the opinion of most interviewees, including the owner/managers, workers dealing with OSH or external experts providing OSH services. More importantly, however, the targeted group of users — business owners and workers — pointed out that OiRA was particularly valuable as a tool and a method that guided them through the RA process. It provided them with the RA report and action plan and, most importantly, helped them organise the assessment process and follow up. On the one hand, its step-by-step structure pointed to areas that should be checked and evaluated. However, on the other hand, in doing so, **OiRA was recognised as a method that increases the thoroughness of RA so that no risk is overlooked**. In France in particular, users pointed out that in comparison to previously used methods (e.g. Excel files), OiRA provided much more structure to the assessment. It helped organise the RA so that nothing was overlooked, and the tool was responsive to the changing workplace and legislative environments — something offline methods were not generally reported to support. In that sense, OiRA, as a stand-alone tool, greatly impacted workplace safety in the longer term.

In connection with this, OiRA, by offering a more structured approach, helped its users develop a clearer understanding of what an RA entails. This was particularly emphasised by French users, though similar sentiments were noted, however less explicitly, in interviews with Slovenian and Lithuanian users. For them, OiRA clarified the elements that must be considered in an assessment and helped distinguish workplace RAs from other types of occupational assessments. OiRA also enhanced users' understanding of the depth and thoroughness required for an effective assessment. For example, Slovenian employers were noted to sometimes have an incomplete grasp of what an RA involves, and OiRA played a role in addressing this gap. Compared to other tools, OiRA provided users with a better conceptual framework for conducting RAs, ultimately having a positive impact on their risk management practices.

Figure 2. Characteristics of OiRA use as a stand-alone tool



5.2 OiRA as a complementary tool

The study identified OiRA users in Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus who preferred using the tools alongside other RA tools or having additional tools in place to support the OiRA assessment. While the reasons for establishments combining OiRA with other tools varied across companies and countries, there were some common themes identified as well.

- **Previous experiences with RA with other tools and methods (Cyprus, Slovenia)**

A common practice among interviewees using OiRA is integrating it with existing RA methods with which they are more familiar. This approach is primarily driven by convenience and previous experiences with other tools. In such cases, OiRA is employed for the aspects/areas/topics it handles most effectively, while other tools and methods are used to cover different areas and assessments. That was the case especially in Slovenia, where external OSH experts often use the AUVA/ZVD method (please see Chapter 6, Cross-national findings on RA and other tools). Both these methods are deeply rooted in the RA landscape in Slovenia and were reported to be seen as the 'go-to' methods for RA. In that case, to select OiRA tools, there would need to be a certain need or incentive to use another method. One specific need that arose during the last years was with the COVID-19 pandemic, when the established RA tools had no information to offer and the respective OiRA COVID-19 tool was specifically appreciated. Similarly, in Cyprus, OSH internal experts, to a large extent, were familiar with other approaches or methods used in the past; therefore, they used OiRA as a secondary tool to their pre-established methods to complement their approach.

- **Educational purposes (Lithuania, Slovenia, Cyprus)**

Across countries and users, OiRA was praised for its educational value. The overarching opinion in each country was that **OiRA is a great educational tool**. The educational value and use of OiRA can be categorised as: (1) supporting the less experienced in the assessment process, (2) improving the ownership of the RA/OSH and making the process more thorough.

Users regarded OiRA as an excellent tool for companies with less experience in the field, mostly the owners and workers of SMEs. As discussed in the previous section, this group of users benefits from OiRA's structured approach, as it provides guidance. In that sense, it not only helped in terms of

no risk of being overlooked but also facilitated the whole RA process. Overall, interviewees highlighted OiRA's ability to improve understanding and awareness of occupational safety and OSH practices, particularly for those less versed in OSH.

Further, many interviewees perceived OiRA as an **excellent tool for teaching and learning about risks**, independent of the size of the company or the level of experience of the person assessing them. For example, even more experienced external experts highly appreciated OiRA tools for pointing them in the direction of risks they did not previously recognise or that they had overlooked (see section *Validation purposes* below). Its impact was seen in terms of sensitising the employer about the risks — showcasing their extent and providing more understanding of what they are and how to counteract them. This was true, even if the employer was not the one who was completing the RA, as one external OSH expert summarised:

> *The planned measures in OiRA show very nicely the possible measures, and they have a very good educational function. Although we do not use OiRA to produce RAs, we refer employers to look at OiRA and learn what a risk assessment covers and how deep it goes. … The teaching aspect and the educational aspect is excellent, so that employers see the depth of the requirements and the possible measures for elimination or risk reduction. The possibility for employers to do at least part of the assessment themselves has a great educational effect on employers.*
>
> **External OSH service provider for healthcare, education, public administration, metal processing, car maintenance sectors**
>
> Slovenia

Overall, the educational value of OiRA was manifested in two ways. On the one hand, external OSH experts especially used **OiRA tools as a learning platform for clients** while using another method to conduct the RA, which resulted in the proof of an RA having been carried out**.** Another example is when **companies or OSH experts decide to supplement their OSH knowledge with OiRA** for their own RA purposes. This process of re-evaluation and reflection was described as, for example, 'rethinking risks', 'considering alternative scenarios', 'revitalising knowledge' and 'refocussing'. OiRA, as an educational tool, became, in these instances, a tool for overall improving workplace safety by providing extensive information about the risks in one place. It inspired its users to approach the assessments more thoroughly, as one interviewee described:

> ***I used OiRA mostly for education purposes*** *as it was not a good fit for my workplace … However, I took some ideas and embedded them into my own risk assessment … Even if you have 20 years of experience in the sector, you can't claim that you don't need any help … I enjoy gathering new ideas; for example, I took some ideas from the OiRA tool related to ergonomics.*
>
> **Safety, health and quality manager, healthcare, medical research and education sector**
>
> Cyprus

Overall, OiRA's impact on workplace safety is considerable, even if not used to produce RAs, but rather to educate users about OSH risks and relevant legal requirements. This quality was not mentioned in relation to other methods, making OiRA unique in this regard.

- **Validation purposes (Lithuania, Slovenia, Cyprus)**

Another important use of OiRA was to **cross-check its results with the outcomes of the other RA methods**. While not often mentioned, this was noted by some interviewees in Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus. This way of using OiRA points to its recognition as a source of up-to-date and comprehensive information against which other assessments can be validated**,** even if they were preferred over OiRA. Overall, this selective use allows companies and OSH experts to ensure that their existing assessments are thorough and to identify any potential gaps.

In one instance, a small Lithuanian workplace had previously conducted an RA with an external expert yet used OiRA to perform an additional assessment. They found that the RA results from OiRA closely mirrored those obtained from the external OSH experts, thereby validating the external OSH provider's work and assessment.

Another concrete example of how another method was validated by using OiRA was given by a Slovenian interviewee, who used OiRA to supplement the results produced by the other method, thereby validating the results:

> *We used different methods to implement the full RA. The basis of the method is the AUVA, which was supplemented with requirements from the OiRA … [such as] actions and measures from OiRA that were meaningful and not present in the AUVA method.*
>
> **Internal OSH specialist in the care facility/ caregiving sector**
>
> Slovenia

- **Source of legislative information (Lithuania, Slovenia, Cyprus)**

Building on the previously mentioned ways of using OiRA alongside other tools and methods, OiRA was frequently recognised as the only tool that **enables the checking of risks against the most current legislation**. Due to this highly praised functionality, OiRA was sometimes used to further validate assessments or cross-check them against legislation to ensure completeness and relevance. This approach served a dual purpose: it acted as an educational exercise, enhancing legal knowledge about OSH and risk management and ensured that all risks, as required by legislation, were appropriately covered.

As an educational tool, OiRA's legislative feedback feature was highly valued for its guidance through specific legislative articles, explaining what is required at each step and offering detailed explanations on how to act and what measures to implement. As one survey respondent mentioned: 'OiRA presents legal regulations and also includes explanations on how to act and/or what measures to take'. Users also reported that it **improved their familiarity with the latest OSH legislation**, as the tools are regularly updated to reflect current laws. Therefore, OiRA was seen as highly practical in terms of providing updated legal information.

Treated as part of RA management, even if OiRA was not applied to conduct full and compliant RA, it was still recognised as a tool that allows for more thorough assessments by checking for legislative aspects that had been missed. This way, users can use OiRA as a 'compliance' or 'legal validation' tool to ensure that their assessments fulfil all required standards.

- **Gaps in the OiRA tools (Lithuania, Slovenia)**

There were, however, some reported gaps that OiRA tools were not able to fill. In Lithuania, interviewees reported **combining OiRA tools with external OSH services to complement technical measurements that they could not cover with OiRA**. This need was expressed by representatives of both small and large companies, suggesting that it can be a common experience regardless of the company size in Lithuania. Indeed, several companies highlighted the need to also include technical

measurements, such as measurements of noise or light, which they considered relevant and legally required for a valid RA. In addition, other areas of risks were missed by several interviewees, such as the evaluation of manual handling in Slovenia and Lithuania. In Slovenia, a concrete link was made here to a new law requiring the use of a specific RA method, the Key Indicator Method - Pushing/Pulling (KIM-PP). In Slovenia and Lithuania, users also mentioned the need for including a psychosocial RA in their overall assessment, a topic that was not covered sufficiently in the tools according to interviewees.

In Slovenia, OiRA users mentioned the lack of a specific template that can be considered the legally required Safety Statement. Users also mentioned the lack of a form to register and record the consultation with workers or their representatives, which are usually written documents that should be prepared after conducting the RA and confirming the scope and completion of the RA as well as the worker involvement.

The mention of these specific gaps were additional to a general lack of clarity on OiRA, in how far it would be considered a legally valid proof of RA in Lithuania, Cyprus and Slovenia. In France, this doubt was not mentioned by interviewees. The legal validity of OiRA RA is further discussed in Chapter 7, Comparative findings on OiRA and non-OiRA users.

5.3 Differences in OiRA use between MSEs and bigger companies

OiRA tools were developed to support RA among MSEs since these companies face specific challenges with regard to RA and OSH. However, the study findings suggest that companies of different sizes decide to use OiRA to support their RA. Notably, the company size and complexity of operations impact the company's needs in terms of RA and, consequently, the expectations from the selected tools.

These differences in the assessment of OiRA were observable in all countries in this study. In Lithuania, representatives of large companies criticised the tools' lack of specificity and **overly simplistic approach** for medium and big companies. Such a concern was raised, for example, by an internal OSH expert delivering RAs in a medium-sized automation sector company, saying that 'OiRA is too simple,' making it 'not exhaustive, incomplete, not sufficient for such complex and hazardous activities'. Representatives of companies from the construction sectors claimed that the tool was insufficient to cover their dynamic environment properly. Similarly, in France, representatives of large companies claimed that OiRA tools were 'too generic' to cover their operations. In Slovenia, OSH external experts reported that they were not considering using OiRA for RA in large companies.

Complexity of operations was another relevant factor with regard to expectations on the scope of OiRA tools. For example, a company selling and storing electrification and automation equipment in Lithuania mentioned that the OiRA Warehousing tool was not complex enough for their needs. While they appreciated the coverage of the most prevalent risks in the sectors, such as slippage, sharp things, falling objects and lighting, they also needed inputs on the more complicated risks and hazards, such as risks associated with welding. While this example is quite specific, it illustrates the issue of tool complexity. OiRA tools are developed to address general sectoral needs and follow the most frequent types of activities in the companies in the chosen sectors. Often their content is carefully chosen to serve the specific target group of MSEs and to take care to not overload them with too lengthy and too complicated RAs. Results from the French study (EU-OSHA, 2023) point to this specific aspect and show that depending on the size of the company, the content of an OiRA tool might be evaluated as too simple, just right, or even sometimes as too extensive and too complex. It is clear from this research that finding the right balance for each tool and taking a well-considered decision on what to include or not is key to the tools serving the needs of their primary target group.

Several companies in Lithuania and France appreciated the tool's scope, even though they carried out complex operations. In these instances, they divided the RA according to the company operations. One example is a public health institution employing over 500 people in Lithuania. They reported carrying out 99 RAs among 230 of their units. Similarly, a large law enforcement establishment in Lithuania is conducting separate RAs with OiRA for every individual workplace and, by the end, they expect to have completed 600 RAs. In France, an IT company responsible for equipment installation used OiRA to conduct RA separately for each client and job site. **These examples indicate that, in some cases, companies with more complex operations may find ways to use the OiRA tools effectively.**

Small companies in most countries had different views on the OiRA tool's complexity. In France, smaller companies reported OiRA tools as 'too detailed' or 'just enough detailed'. In Lithuania, small companies were interviewed, and they seemed to be looking for a minimal level of RA, expressing dissatisfaction with the tool's scope for being too comprehensive. For example, an external OSH service provider for a small woodworking company and a small agricultural company both assessed the tool as too comprehensive, as it took them too long, in their view, to carry out the RA, with many questions deemed to be irrelevant to the company's operations. This view was echoed by an internal OSH expert in Cyprus, who claimed that the comprehensiveness of OiRA might discourage these companies. Similar opinions were expressed by some external OSH experts from Slovenia, for example:

> *The hairdressers for whom we applied OiRA are mostly poorly educated about OSH topics and generally rather underestimate all OSH issues. Through the RA process, however, they see that it is a very broad field, with many requirements, and they are a little intimidated by it all.*
>
> **External OSH service provider for the healthcare sector (unspecified OiRA tools)**
>
> Slovenia

Nevertheless, many companies, regardless of size and country, appreciated the complexity of OiRA tools. For example, an OSH expert in Cyprus appreciated that the OiRA education tool covered not only risks associated with facilities (e.g. a classroom) but also related to activities within and beyond these facilities (e.g. during an excursion outside the classroom). Similarly, another interviewee, who used the OiRA tool for the hotel sector, praised the tool's ability to distinguish between various hotel facilities, such as buildings and restaurants, as each is subject to different risks.

Overall, there was mixed feedback on the OiRA tool's complexity, with some companies finding this just right while others would like more or less information. However, these results need to be looked at while not losing the target group, MSEs, as the primary focus of the tools. Finally, no doubt, finding the right level of content, complexity and even OSH jargon for each tool depends not only on the target group but also on the OSH education in the specific sector, which, on the other hand, will shape the OSH experience of those in charge.

5.4 Role of internal and external OSH experts in OiRA use

The study gathered information on using the OiRA tool in diverse roles in companies and the OSH environment. Internal and external OSH experts provided different perspectives on OiRA in selecting, using and assessing the tools when compared to non-OSH expert OiRA users. These considerations were found to be relevant in Cyprus, where the sample consisted mainly of internal OSH experts using OiRA (often as a secondary tool), and in Slovenia, where the sample consisted mainly of external OSH experts using OiRA with their clients. In Lithuania, OiRA users often combined completing OiRA with some services provided by OSH external experts. The sample also included external OSH experts doing RA with their clients in Lithuania.

In general, external OSH experts were more likely to report that the tool was not comprehensive enough and claimed that they needed to add risks, measures or missing documentation while carrying out an RA with OiRA. It is an obvious interpretation that these opinions seemed to be related to the OSH expertise of these experts, since they are understood to have expertise knowledge on OSH and RA, which the main target group of OiRA, MSEs, do not necessarily have.

At the same time, external OSH experts had clear opinions on the tool's suitability for 'regular' users. They frequently claimed that company representatives may not be qualified enough, do not have a proper understanding of OSH to use OiRA or that the companies would not be capable of understanding the terminology used in the tool. Often, they pointed to the issues with IT literacy, for example:

> *When employers attempted to use OiRA themselves, the process was very slow and consequently unappealing to them. … If the client creates it [RA using OiRA] themselves and only consults us, the process becomes too lengthy, and clients tend to avoid it. … It is user-friendly enough for OSH professionals, but it is too demanding for those with poor IT literacy.*
>
> **External OSH service provider for unspecified companies (office work, shops, cleaning, hairdressers, road transport tools)**
>
> Slovenia

These reflections of the external OSH experts may hold true for some companies. However, the study gathered examples proving the contrary — **many companies stated to have successfully used OiRA independently without the help from external OSH experts** across all four countries and rated OiRA as easy to use and user friendly. Undoubtedly, the support of external OSH experts can make the OiRA experience easier, smoother and more comprehensive. Further, in Slovenia and Lithuania, external OSH experts played an important role in addressing areas of technical assessments that could not be covered with the OiRA tools available in these countries. In Slovenia, external OSH experts also handled specific legal requirements for documentation of the RA, while in Lithuania, they delivered technical measurements, as described in section 5.2, OiRA as a complementary tool.

However, while the tool is dedicated to micro and small companies, the fact that **external OSH experts also use it and consider it to be useful** should be noted. Several external OSH experts in Lithuania and Slovenia mentioned recommending the OiRA tools for clients, either based on their services or by recommending companies to carrying out their RA independently. In any case, the role of external OSH experts is important to consider, also in terms of possible intermediaries for communicating and promoting OiRA.

At the same time it should not be forgotten that OiRA tools were designed as a free-of-charge RA resource available to companies facing challenges in carrying out their RA. When OiRA is not being used internally in the companies, interview results show that there is risk of a certain disconnection to the RA results. While OiRA is specifically appreciated by end users for its educational aspects, it is exactly this dimension that end users might not come in contact with, if they do not use OiRA internally but have it filled out by an external consultant. As interview results show, there is at least a lack of information on the follow-up actions from the RA and in several cases external OSH experts even assume that the delivered RA has not been followed up on internally with the implementation of measures to mitigate the identified risks. As one interviewee stated:

> *From our side, after we submit the RA, we no longer have contact with the employer, and we don't know if supervision or measures are implemented. The only contact is when incidents occur, and the employer contacts us for advice. Also, we don't have the levers to control and implement measures.*
>
> **External OSH service provider for healthcare, education, public administration, metal processing and car maintenance sectors (most available OiRA tools)**
>
> Slovenia

As such, lack of access to OiRA software and the one-time nature of RA may limit the positive outcomes of the OiRA RA. While many direct OiRA users across countries and company sizes appreciated the tool's online nature and the ability to adjust the RA on several occasions (for example, on an annual basis, in case of change/emerging risk/near-miss/accident), the incentive to engage better in RA and OSH might not be given if establishments are only provided with the final report.

Perhaps the fact that it is so easy to come back to and update will encourage more frequent identification and attention to risks.

CEO, veterinary sector

France

Overall, the issue of external OSH experts using OiRA tools seems to be recognised and addressed. Since the tool is free of charge, in a straightforward way, OiRA tools may be seen as threats to the paid services of external OSH experts. However, based on the interview findings, **national OiRA partners seem to manage relationships with external OSH experts efficiently** since they use the tool or even recommend companies to use external experts to complete OiRA RA efficiently. Recently developed features, which can be enabled at country level, might further help to facilitate a win-win relationship between companies and OSH services, based on OiRA. The training feature within OiRA allows companies to get a full online overview in terms of slides, showing their current state of RA and measures that were decided. Another feature is the OSH consultancy feature, which allows a multi-user access to RAs done in OiRA. After the joint completion of the RA in the software, the OSH service can then validate the RA online and as such the company has an online proof of the externally validated RA.

Internal OSH experts who used OiRA in their companies also seemed to have a specific perspective on the tool, especially in Cyprus. In general, they appreciated the tool's scope and valued its OSH guidance and potential for validation and education, but at the same time, they mainly used OiRA as a secondary tool. In most cases, they already had a pre-established internal RA method, allowing flexibility and customisation of RA processes.

5.5 Key insights on diversified use of OiRA

The OiRA tools were developed on the basis of the challenges faced by micro and small companies that often lack time, finances and OSH expertise to conduct RAs. Therefore, OiRA tools were intended to address this gap and enhance OSH compliance. While there was no single scenario on how OiRA was intended to be used, OiRA tools aim to support the RA process from start to end and going beyond the mere assessment. That means resulting in the legally required proof that the RA has been carried out but also giving support in following up accordingly on the RA results by providing information and guidance for taking the respective measures.

In this context, the study's findings, which compare the use of OiRA tools to other RA methods, could suggest some limitations of OiRA when used alone. However, the use of OiRA alongside other tools should be evaluated from two perspectives, as explained below.

First, it could be claimed that OiRA tools have some shortcomings; therefore, they are also used in combination with other tools in three out of the four countries that were looked at. For example, in Lithuania, users reported gaps in coverage of technical/physical risks. That gap can prevent companies from using OiRA tools in Lithuania, or if they decide to use OiRA, they might see the need to supplement RAs with these measurements, most commonly with the support of OSH external services. Therefore, it could be argued that in Lithuania OiRA does not fully respond to the company's needs in relation to RA. In Slovenia, users of OiRA tools pointed out the documentation gaps required to deliver legally compliant RAs. In Cyprus, no specific legal gap was reported; however, interviewed respondents leaned towards their internal approaches, which were often more tailored to the specifics of their workplaces. **It is important to address these gaps when using OiRA as a primary tool, where possible and relevant**, as seems to have been done in France where OiRA was used by all interviewees as a stand-alone tool. However, OiRA tools and other RA methods should also be investigated from another perspective.

The use of OiRA with other tools could be **considered concerning the notion of enriching RA methods in Lithuania, Slovenia, Cyprus and, even in limited cases, France**. Indeed, as discussed throughout the report, OiRA tools were combined with other tools due to their educational value, clear links to relevant legislation, and the fact that they address the gaps in RA practice (for example, in the case of the OiRA COVID-19 tool). From this perspective, using OiRA with other RA tools should be

considered a positive outcome. Interview findings indicate that OiRA tools are used beyond their intended scope of coverage and address the gaps of other RA tools where relevant and applicable. This is especially relevant when looking at the completion rates of RAs done by OiRA users, where RA with low and medium completion so far had been interpreted as a lack of success of the respective tools. However, learning about the complementary role of OiRA, it becomes clear that an RA does not necessarily have to be filled out in OiRA for being assessed as useful. In the cases where OiRA was used with a very specific aim in mind, such as for educational purposes, for a checklist or to fill in a gap in the primary RA method, these statistics do not accurately reflect the success rate of the RA and OiRA tools but might rather reflect the specific scope within which OiRA tools were used. In that sense, even a user who has not answered any statements in a tool might have taken useful insights from the use of the tool.

Similarly, the case of using OiRA tools with external OSH experts should be investigated from two perspectives. On the one hand, **at first glance using OiRA tools with paid services of OSH external experts seems to undermine the goal of providing free-of-charge RA tools**. Importantly, in Lithuania, the technical measurements (light, noise, dust) seem to be, in principle, impossible to cover within OiRA, given that they require specific equipment and expertise to conduct these measurements. In these cases, it should be acknowledged that certain OiRA tools can efficiently support RA only to some extent, in terms of it being covered in-house. In these cases, **OiRA tools, rather than providing a free-of-charge experience with RA, contribute to reducing the costs of RA to a minimum**, which needs to be covered with the support of OSH experts. Similarly, in Slovenia, it could be argued that external OSH experts supported companies with using OiRA and addressing legal gaps. Further, they also supported companies in the RA process and often were the ones to suggest the use of OiRA. At the same time, using OiRA tools with external experts also has some disadvantages, as indicated before. The external process often reduces the possibility of companies taking over more responsibility for OSH internally and there seem to be cases when the preventive measures are not implemented if the RA is not done in-house but rather seen as an external tick-box exercise.

While mindful of the duality of using OiRA tools with other approaches, it is helpful to investigate the comparative perspective. Indeed, **in France, almost all OiRA tool users used the tool as a primary tool without the support of other methods**. In Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus, many users highlighted the use of OiRA with other tools. The most obvious differences in countries' use and assessment of OiRA tools lie in their OSH environments and regulatory framework, but other factors, such as the structure and development of the tools' content as well as the communication about it (e.g. its legal validity), do play an important role as well.

In all four countries, users had similar motivations to try out the OiRA tool — to meet legal requirements while finding a better tool than those used in their previous approaches (if any). Most users across the countries had a person in charge of RA who decided to select the tool and navigate the RA completion, often including workers, both formally and informally. Users had different approaches to completing RA, appreciating the tools' flexibility, and, overall, they were satisfied with the experience. They expressed different ideas for the improvements of the tools; however, they mostly assessed the tool positively as a clear, reliable and educational tool that effectively provided OSH guidance and supported their RA processes in diverse ways — depending on how the OiRA tools were used as primary or secondary method. However, there are two key differences:

- French users generally appreciated the reports and action plan (with some suggestions for improvements). In Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus, users praised the existence of reports and action plans. However, they assessed critically the general report, highlighting many relevant improvements to enhance usability. These discussions are presented in the section Working with reports and action plans in Chapter 4, Cross-national insights on the practicalities of using OiRA tools.

- French users were convinced that OiRA outputs could be used as proof of RA, and some of them confirmed inspections where an RA using OiRA was successfully recognised. In contrast, in the other three countries, OiRA users reported being unsure whether an RA using OiRA would be seen as legally compliant RA proof — again for different reasons in each of the countries under focus. This aspect will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

Further, given the diversified use of OiRA tools, it could be argued that their scope is broader than initially assumed. Indeed, the study suggests that while OiRA tools are helpful for their key audience of smaller companies across all four countries, they are also used and appreciated by other users. As discussed in section 5.3, Differences in OiRA use between small and medium enterprises and large companies, OiRA was also appreciated by users in large companies. While these users expressed mixed feedback about the tool's complexity, they appreciated the tool as a whole. In Slovenia, Lithuania and Cyprus, OiRA tools were especially relevant for public institutions, including large establishments. Similarly, as presented in section 5.4, Role of internal and external OSH experts in OiRA use, OiRA tools were also relevant in the work of external OSH experts, who either recommended the tools to companies for educational reasons or who used the tools for doing the RA for their clients (especially MSEs).

Considering these various ways of using OiRA and its positive and negative consequences, OiRA tools were relevant to companies' RA needs in different ways, including also medium and even large companies. OiRA proved to be an alternative to existing approaches in all four countries, allowing companies to conduct the RA satisfactorily, saving financial resources and getting additional insights**.**

While it might be useful to eliminate any straightforward obstacle to using OiRA as a stand-alone RA (where relevant and possible), at the same time, the use of OiRA tools in other ways does not undermine the tool's ability to provide support for its primary target group.

6 Cross-national findings on RA and other tools

This chapter aims to provide an overview of other RA methods identified within the study and to contrast the conditions of their use to OiRA. As for OiRA users, these methods and approaches need to be looked at in the comparative perspective of OSH awareness and RA practice, taking into account that the interviewed target group does not represent the average situation but rather gives indications on how those that are already actively engaged in RA are doing.

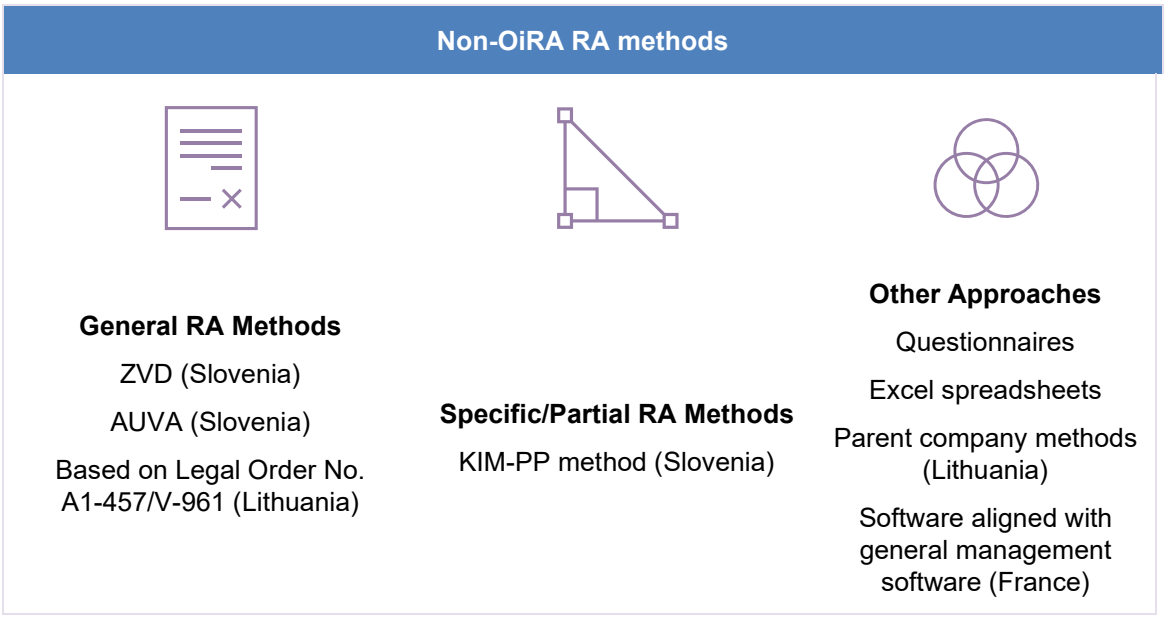
As mentioned in the previous sections on national findings and as will be discussed further below, several RA methods were reported to have been used by the interviewees apart from or in addition to OiRA.

Those can be broadly categorised into online and offline tools. Furthermore, these can be separated into:

- established RA methods (that are recognised, official and/or backed by the OSH authorities);
- methods individually developed for the companies or by the OSH expert conducting RA;
- parent company methods that are followed by the local branches of the companies; and
- bigger commercial approaches that go in line with the management software used in the companies (France).

These can also be grouped into general, specific and other methods, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Summary of non-OiRA RA methods mentioned during the research



- **Established RA methods**

In two of the countries in this study (Lithuania, Slovenia), interviewees pointed to other methods for conducting RA, which were either widely recognised or were backed by or drawn from legislation — that is, they were based on the method and forms provided in legislation. All of them were offline, checklist-type assessments, which were used free of charge. While some of them were of a general nature — that is, to provide a comprehensive RA — others were methods dedicated to specific types of assessments.

Specifically, the first category includes, for example, ZVD and AUVA methods.[7] Further, interviewees from Lithuania reported that they follow the procedure and format of the RA provided in the law on RA.

Within the second category — recognised methods to assess specific risks — interviewees (in Slovenia) reported on, for example, the KIM-PP methodology, developed by the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Germany (BAuA) to assess risks connected with manual handling.[8]

- **Customised methods**

In addition to the methods explored above, interviewees from all countries reported using a mix of various other approaches. These were typically either: (1) developed by OSH specialists (internal or external) or by the companies themselves to directly address their specific needs or due to personal preferences and habits; or (2) inherited or adapted from previous OSH specialists serving the company or other companies. It is worth noting that since many companies use external services, the methods applied by those experts are mostly at their discretion.

The offline methods in this category can be broadly summarised as follows:

[7] The ZVD method, developed by Slovenia's Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in 1999, became widely adopted due to it being promoted by authorities and the lack of alternative methods at the time. The AUVA method, created by the Austrian General Accident Insurance Institute, offers a structured approach by calculating the Level of Risk as the product of Risk Probability and Risk Severity. Further, in Lithuania, interviewees reported following the RA approach indicated in Legal Order No. A1-457/V-961 (Ministry of Social Security and Labour and Ministry of Health, 2012), including filling in an Occupational Risk Assessment Card form — an example of which is provided therein.

[8] BAuA, *Risk Assessment with the Key Indicator Methods (KIM)*, website: https://www.baua.de/EN/Topics/Work-design/Risk-assessment/Key-indicator-method. While this method was not reported to be used by the OSH experts directly, it was important context provided through scoping interviews, as the new legislation requires the assessment of risks in connection with safe manual handling of loads. This particular method was discussed as one that responds to the new legal requirements.

- Excel spreadsheets, with inputs led by national legislation, descriptions of good practices from other countries, and information from the authorities' web pages; and
- questionnaires/checklists on different subjects: to assess psychosocial risks, received from colleagues from other companies or developed by the previous OSH specialist at the company (and reviewed).

In addition to these offline methods, French interviewees only indicated the use of online tools (in the three other countries, OiRA was reported to be known as the only online platform to conduct RA). French interviewees reported using six separate online software tools; however, none were free of charge or backed by the national authorities. They were either modules of software used for management or separate applications (either for general or sector-specific RAs). They had different functionalities, including possibly being used offline or supporting collaboration. They also provided reports at the end of the RA and suggested mitigation measures.

- **Parent company methods**

Lastly, a small number of companies indicated that they follow RA processes based on the methods developed by the parent company. While those were limited instances, they are worth mentioning, as they provide important insights into the potential of OiRA's more widespread use. In those instances, companies were local branches of international entities. Because the main parent company expected the local branch to follow the established OSH management procedures, there were not many options for developing or testing new approaches.

6.1 Why and how were tools other than OiRA chosen?

Interviewees' assessments of non-OiRA RA tools varied in terms of **perceived cost, flexibility and established credibility, influencing their adoption compared to OiRA**. For smaller workplaces, the decision-making process regarding which tool to use was less complicated, although some of these factors were still considered. Consequently, in those companies OiRA was more frequently used as a stand-alone tool for RA without the need to supplement it with other types of assessments.

One of the most important factors influencing the choice of specific methods was their perceived **credibility and the validity of their outputs**. The main considerations in selecting an appropriate approach included ensuring the fulfilment of legal requirements, the comprehensiveness of the assessment and, most importantly, addressing the particular needs of the workplace. For general RA methods such as ZVD, AUVA and those following the legislative framework, experts opted for these because they perceived them to align with regulatory expectations for RAs. Especially in Slovenia, experts were more familiar with these commonly used methods, resulting in **insufficient incentives to completely switch to OiRA**.

Additionally, some methods — either established techniques for assessing specific risks or those individually developed or implemented by experts — were perceived to offer **greater flexibility**. This was particularly true in larger, more complex workplaces. Consequently, these methods were chosen to complement OiRA assessments or used instead of OiRA altogether, as they were seen as better addressing particular (mostly sectoral) needs. An important example is the methods used to assess **psychosocial risks**, which OiRA did not cover but were provided by other tools, proving crucial in various sectors.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that **not all companies had the same ability to freely choose their RA method**. Some companies were branches of larger entities and thus had to follow the rules established for the entire organisation. Additionally, when external experts were employed, they were the ones deciding on the method, at their discretion.

7 Comparative findings on OiRA and non-OiRA users

OiRA was **generally assessed positively by its users across all four countries**. Overall, users found OiRA to be especially suitable for MSEs, particularly those with less hazardous working environments.

Users found that OiRA's design aligns especially well with the needs of smaller enterprises by providing a comprehensive yet manageable approach to RA.

One of the most frequently cited strengths of OiRA is its **user-friendly design**. Most users found the tool easy to learn and implement, with a clear and functional layout that facilitates navigation — although some indicated that it has a learning curve, especially for those less proficient in working with IT. The language used in OiRA was mostly found to be accessible, possibly reducing barriers for users with limited prior knowledge of OSH.

OiRA was also regarded as a tool that **facilitates and streamlines the RA process, as it provides an organised structure for conducting RAs**, which users have found to be beneficial. The tool guides users systematically through the RA process, ensuring that all relevant risks are identified and assessed, which was a valuable asset for less experienced and more experienced OSH professionals alike. Both features, coupled with being free of charge, were perceived as lowering the entry barriers for those who wished to conduct the assessments internally but had to do so with limited resources and knowledge.

Another standout feature of OiRA is **its ability to generate practical action plans** that directly address identified risks. These action plans meet users' needs by being both preventive and motivating, helping companies implement safety measures and prevent future accidents. They make safety measures clearer and more recognisable, increasing users' accountability in managing risks.

While OiRA was predominantly assessed positively by its users, some **shortcomings were also identified**. Certain criticisms came mostly **from larger enterprises**, although these are not the primary intended beneficiaries of OiRA. However, some of these issues may affect the widespread adoption of OiRA across companies of various sizes. The following sections discuss the most important aspects of users' assessments of OiRA, highlighting how it compares to other methods and showcasing both its strengths and identified challenges.

- **OiRA as the only online tool**

One of the primary advantages of OiRA, widely acknowledged by users, is that it is an accessible online tool. With the exception of France, OiRA was the only available online tool for conducting RA in the three other countries studied, according to interviewees. This online availability was highly appreciated, especially when compared to other RA methods, which were often offline and, as a result, less adaptable.

In France, interviewees reported the existence of other online RA tools, often embedded within broader management software. These alternatives were often valued for their compatibility with other company systems and for offering modules that extend beyond OSH to include planning and accounting functions. Such integration into a company's overarching management system was perceived as enhancing internal communication and facilitating information exchange — a quality that was highly regarded.

In other countries, however, OiRA stood out because no comparable online alternatives were reported. As an online tool, OiRA provides several advantages over offline methods. First, as software rather than offline questionnaires, tables or matrixes, it streamlined the RA process, making it more efficient, which was particularly valued by users. Second, its online nature allowed for more responsive and rapid updates to reflect current challenges and legislation — most notably during the COVID-19 pandemic (see section OiRA's importance during the COVID-19 pandemic), but also in response to general regulatory changes. OiRA's ability to stay aligned with the latest legal requirements was a unique feature that set it apart from other methods, which cannot be updated as swiftly. Some users also noted its appeal as a modern tool, making it an interesting option.

However, there were also some comments from external experts on OiRA's online format. In Slovenia, for example, several experienced external OSH providers were of the opinion that using OiRA effectively required a certain level of IT proficiency, which could pose challenges for some users. This need for digital skills was cited as a potential barrier to its broader adoption, especially for those less versed in OSH and IT. However, this feedback was not reflected by those companies using OiRA directly; on the contrary, they reported how easy the software was to use.

- **OiRA as a sectoral tool**

Compared to other methods, OiRA was recognised for providing tailored, sector-specific tools. Companies appreciated the fact that OiRA was well-suited to their specific lines of work and considered it practical. Users noted that by addressing the particular risks and regulatory requirements of individual sectors, **OiRA provided relevant measures, and risks were well identified**. **Users recognised that these measures were a good match for their sector's requirements and environment**, and their opinion was also shared by more experienced OSH professionals, who reported that the measures were appropriate and well-tailored.

Overall, when deciding on the RA method to be applied in the workplace, OiRA was reported to be chosen specifically because of this characteristic. Other, more commonly used RA methods are often more general in nature, and almost no interviewee reported using other sector-specific tools, apart from a few users in France. Furthermore, when OiRA offered a specific tool for a particular sector, it was chosen over other methods or used to supplement more general RA tools. The office work tool, for example, was popular across all companies because it was specifically designed for such a working environment. Even if an enterprise had different activities altogether, office work was often still part of its operations. Therefore, the OiRA tool presented itself as a good and suitable alternative to more general assessment methods.

Overall, OiRA was able to provide dedicated tools for specific tasks, even if the company was engaged in other activities and chose to use different RA methods for the rest of its operations. This feature of OiRA remains one of its most unique and important characteristics, recognised across users.

- **OiRA's ability to provide OSH guidance**

In comparison with other tools and methods, OiRA also had one significant advantage: it guided users through the RA process and in this way, it also increased their knowledge about OSH and RA management. While other methods often require better comprehension and proficiency in the area of OSH, **OiRA is suitable for use by those with less expertise**. In this way, the study confirmed that OiRA actually did reach its goal in supporting companies that had decided to move towards internally conducted RA instead of procuring external services (especially in Lithuania). Overall, other RA methods were sometimes recognised as too complicated by persons who had just started providing OSH services — for example, AUVA in Slovenia. **OiRA, on the other hand, provided support, which translates to a better understanding and recognition of risks and measures.** Additionally, the French study showed that several users of other methods did not actually have a clear understanding of what an RA encompasses. Sometimes interviewees confused the RA with medical surveillance or other processes, a situation that was not reported by OiRA users. This is another proof of OiRA's educational value compared to other approaches.

- **OiRA as a source of OSH knowledge**

Interviewees noted that OiRA provides them with an approach to systematically identify risks. They reported that the OiRA tools helped them to **point out potentially unsafe issues that might have been overlooked or just not considered otherwise**. By showing all the different risks, users — including experienced OSH experts — were able to look at the workplace environment through different lenses, be a bit more creative in their RAs and rethink the approaches they had applied so far. As one of the French interviewees noted, even if OiRA did not point out potential risks, it encouraged users to dig deeper and consider other possibilities:

> *It's a really good tool. It also makes you think about things. For example, there was a question about whether we own a lift. We do not, but it made me think about other things such as the staircase or the ramp, etc. It makes you think about other possible scenarios, it's not a tick-box situation.*
>
> **Co-owner, restaurant**
>
> France

This OiRA capability was of special importance, as it was not something other methods were reported to facilitate. Therefore, OiRA was used to supplement other methods in this regard, and even if not used in the way that was originally intended, it was still proving impactful. That is, while OiRA may not have been used to conduct the full RA, it was still a very valuable resource, with a tangible impact on workplace safety, and users used it to gain insights to improve risk management.

Furthermore, OiRA's educational impact extended to both workers and employers, setting it apart from other methods. Employers were encouraged to learn more about risk-related issues and mitigation measures, whether they conducted the OiRA assessment themselves or when it was led or supported by external experts. This was particularly evident in Slovenia, where external service providers noted that using OiRA with clients — employers and business owners — helped illustrate the breadth of risk considerations and increased awareness of OSH issues. In France, OiRA also facilitated worker engagement in the RA process, educating them and making the entire process more transparent.

- **OiRA as a source of legal information**

Even when OiRA was used as a supplementary method or by more experienced OSH experts, its ability to point users to specific legal requirements was very important and highly praised, as other tools did not provide this type of opportunity. Regardless of OSH management proficiency, OiRA provided information about the most current legislation, in contrast to other methods. Because of this, those who were conducting or co-conducting the RAs (e.g. in Slovenia) **were able to familiarise themselves with the legal requirements of risk management in a way that was not possible when using other tools**. It also had the ability to present the extent of risks — for example, to management — and by linking these with legislation, increased the validity of the findings while raising awareness of OSH and risks overall. It seems that this added value of OiRA was specifically highlighted in Slovenia, Lithuania and Cyprus. Meanwhile, in France, OiRA was seen as a trusted tool provided by INRS and the Social Security Organisation, which might be the reason why users did not specifically look for legal information in the tool.

- **OiRA's importance during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The significant advantage of OiRA became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research in this study incorporated insights from companies regarding the pandemic's influence on OSH in the workplace. Importantly and universally, interviewees reported that the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit most often temporarily, heightened awareness of OSH issues. With the increased risks associated with virus transmission, OSH and RA guidance changed and became especially important. However, due to the lack of immediate and clear guidelines on occupational risks and corresponding measures, OiRA emerged as an especially valuable resource.

EU-OSHA's prompt response in developing and publishing the COVID-19 tool proved to have a potentially high impact on workplace OSH. The absence of appropriate methodologies to assess the new risks posed by the virus, mainly offline checklist-type assessments, which are more rigid and are not easily adaptable in such instances, highlighted OiRA's flexibility and responsiveness. OiRA filled this gap, becoming an appreciated resource during the crisis — both for conducting RAs and, equally important, for learning about the COVID-19 risks and measures.

For example, a large Slovenian enterprise involved in port activities sought a tool to assess risks associated with their line of work — as they recognised their workers as vulnerable to virus transmission because of their kind of work. While OiRA could not cover all aspects of RA at this enterprise, it was the only tool that effectively addressed their specific and urgent needs with regard to the COVID-19 risks. This particular use of OiRA underlines its potential to respond effectively to emerging risks, making it a beneficial solution due to its responsive nature and something other tools could not offer.

- **Issues of legal validity of RAs with OiRA**

One of OiRA's most significant shortcomings as highlighted by this research was the perceived lack of clarity regarding the legal validity of its RAs. Users doubted if OiRA would be recognised as a universally acceptable tool during inspections, and there were mixed opinions on its legal standing. This concern

was particularly prevalent in Slovenia, Lithuania and Cyprus, whereas OiRA was generally considered legally valid and backed by authorities in France. Respondents from Slovenia, Lithuania and Cyprus pointed out the mixed communication on OiRA's ability to be used as proof for conducting a legally valid RA.

The issue of legal validity should be considered within the broader context of the reasons behind conducting RAs altogether. The study also asked interviewees why companies perform RAs in general. **The predominant response across countries and enterprises, in line with ESENER results (2019), was that assessments are conducted to comply with legal regulations.** Consequently, the chosen RA method is expected to meet this need.

In France, OiRA was recognised by users as a method that provides documentation of a legally compliant RA process. This recognition was reported to be due to OiRA's association with an official institution, specifically the INRS and the Social Security Organisation. Most French companies reported their intention and confidence to use OiRA during labour inspection visits as proof of a completed RA. In the case of two companies, such inspections had actually taken place — one conducted by the Labour Inspectorate and the other by a health insurance association (Assurance Maladie). In both instances, the OiRA report was accepted by the respective institutions. No French interviewee questioned the validity of such an assessment and the outputs it produces.

This was, however, not the case for other countries. Especially in Slovenia, interviewees — mostly external experts — found OiRA to be lacking some legally required elements. Firstly, it lacked a Safety Statement and a record of consultations with workers (see section 3.3, OiRA tools in Slovenia). According to the interviewees, the OiRA report format is not aligned with those requirements. In Lithuania, some interviewees noted that OiRA does not provide all the technical measurement assessments they consider necessary.

For these reasons, some external experts in Slovenia noted that they frequently use the ZVD method, which they know is officially recognised by labour inspection and with which they are more familiar. In Lithuania, external providers still secured additional assessments even when RAs were conducted internally within companies. In Cyprus, internal OSH experts continued using their internal pre-existing RA methods. As the research shows, companies in Lithuania and Slovenia — especially smaller ones — often prefer external RAs and are motivated largely by a need for legal compliance in their RA management. However, with OiRA's legal status not clearly communicated by the authorities, more familiar or established methods and externalisation of services altogether tend to be a preferred choice in certain cases.

7.1 Key comparative insights

When comparing OiRA with other RA methods and approaches, OiRA emerges as a **very good option for MSEs**, fulfilling its role as an **entry point for internally conducted RAs**, something for which other reported methods were not as suited. Unlike other tools, OiRA guides users through the process, which seems to be something that other methods generally do not offer. Therefore, interviewees — both those conducting RAs at their workplaces and those conducting RAs for their clients — recognised OiRA as a method that is especially relevant for those who are less proficient in OSH. Users appreciated **OiRA's user-friendly interface, clear layout and accessible language**, which reduce barriers for those with limited OSH knowledge. **Being free of charge** further lowers entry barriers for companies with limited resources, encouraging them to conduct internal RAs without incurring additional costs.

At the same time, OiRA was found to be less able to support larger, more complex working environments in which hazardous tasks are carried out. In such cases, other tools were more frequently used, as they were found to be more suitable. Additionally, some questions were raised about the legal validity of RAs carried out using OiRA, leading in some cases to the choice of other methods. However, even in those instances, OiRA played an important role in an organisation's OSH system. Compared to other methods, it offers an online RA process, which means that it is able to provide up-to-date links to current legislation and **be more responsive to changing OSH situations or emerging risks**. It was also recognised as providing a detailed list of risks and measures, to a greater extent than other methods.

Therefore, even when it was not suitable for conducting RA at a specific workplace, OiRA was able to provide something that other methods could not: it was **able to educate about OSH and RAs, both for**

those who are more expert in OSH and those who are less proficient. OiRA reveals itself to be a flexible tool — it can be used as companies require to fulfil their particular needs. In doing so, it is able to provide new knowledge and perspectives on risks because of its interactive, online, sector-specific design. Altogether, OiRA is able to fill in the gaps that have been identified in other tools, by facilitating more comprehensive and detailed RAs especially for MSEs.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Final conclusions

The conclusions of the study should be viewed in light of where **OiRA was positioned within the national OSH context**, as there was no one-size-fits-all role for OiRA across the four countries examined. This variation is due to two main considerations. First, there are different legal requirements for RA in these countries, with legislation specifying (or not) both who can conduct the RA and what it should produce. For example, in both Slovenia and Lithuania, RA must be conducted by a person who is officially certified to do so. Furthermore, the assessment may be required to include specific elements, as in Slovenia, where there are requirements regarding what documents the RA produces should include.

Secondly, and related to this, in the countries where the study was conducted, there was generally low to moderate coverage of RA conducted internally, with Slovenia having the lowest ratio of internally conducted RA in all EU-27 Member States. Therefore, this study included different perspectives stemming from these considerations. While OiRA was designed — and found suitable — for MSEs that wish to conduct RA internally on their own, the study also included the perspectives of external OSH experts, ultimately making the findings more reflective of the practicalities of RA in those countries.

Two main takeaways emerge from the study:

- OiRA effectively facilitates internally conducted RAs in smaller companies, making it a suitable and relevant option for MSEs.
- The use of OiRA extends beyond conducting RAs; its application has proven to be more flexible and adaptable than this.

Overall, the study found that OiRA was used differently across companies, depending on their size, the sector they operated in and who was conducting the RA. Despite these variations, these two key findings remained central to how OiRA was utilised in practice.

The **decision-making process regarding which approach and tool to use** — including OiRA — was primarily guided by which method best suited the **specific needs of the companies**. However, this must be understood in light of the main driver for conducting RAs reported across all countries and by most interviewees: legal compliance. While the chosen RA methods were intended to address particular company needs, the overarching motive was to fulfil legal requirements. In other words, from the companies´ perspectives, RAs must first and foremost meet legal obligations to avoid negative consequences in case of inspection or accident. Therefore, the decision to choose or not choose OiRA was — though not often discussed directly — influenced by this consideration.

The decision-making process in terms of which method to use was also diverse, and this should be considered in the context of the study sample as well. With the diversity of perspectives, smaller to larger companies, including one or multiple types of roles and tasks, and internal and external OSH experts with differing levels of OSH proficiency, comes the **diversity of who makes the decision** and based on what considerations. Importantly, while larger companies (in France, Slovenia and Lithuania) where RA is conducted internally reported that the decision tends to be a taken jointly, in smaller enterprises or where an external OSH provider is employed, it is more likely a one-person decision. This then translates, to a degree, into who was conducting the assessment (using the methods chosen), and, further, also to an extent, the **particular ownership of the RA and implementation of the mitigation measures**. While the sample was too small to provide a definitive answer here, the limited data show that there is a higher likelihood for companies doing internally conducted RAs — especially using OiRA — to show better ownership and to benefit from better transparency of risk management.

Several factors played a role in deciding on testing and further use of OiRA, related to the above-mentioned diversity of the sample in the study, as different perspectives were present:

- legitimacy and endorsement by the national authorities – need for legal compliance,
- alignment with company needs,
- sector-specific applicability,
- cost-effectiveness, and
- professional familiarity.

Official backing and promotion of OiRA by public authorities enhanced its credibility and trustworthiness, making some companies more inclined to adopt it, especially in France and Lithuania. At the same time, questions were raised by interviewees (in Slovenia and Lithuania) regarding the legal validity of OiRA RA, specifically whether the OiRA assessment fulfils legal requirements.

The decision-making process often involved assessing how well **OiRA aligned with specific company requirements, most importantly the complexity of the working environment**. In larger, more hazardous workplaces where various tasks are performed, companies considered whether OiRA met their needs in providing a comprehensive or partial RA. Conversely, in smaller workplaces, the decision-making process was, in this regard, generally more straightforward. Considering this factor, OiRA was found to be well-suited to fulfil the needs for an RA in MSEs.

Furthermore, since OiRA includes **tools designed specifically for various sectors**, it was also chosen (or tested) because **it presented itself as a relevant method**. Particularly for MSEs, if another appropriate sector-specific tool was not easily available, OiRA was found to be useful. In some workplaces, the decision to use OiRA was also based on this consideration. However, OiRA was not always used to provide the entire assessment but was also considered for areas where it provided specific tools (e.g. the office work tool could cover office workplaces in manufacturing). Simultaneously, some sectors require additional measurements (e.g. noise levels), so choosing the RA method was also influenced by this factor. Furthermore, because OiRA is mostly designed around sectors, rather than some areas of OSH concerns or particular tasks, it was found to not cover some assessments interviewees found important, such as the assessment of psychosocial risks.

Users of OiRA also pointed out — especially in France and Lithuania — that OiRA was chosen because it is **free of charge**. This was particularly important for enterprises with limited resources, such as MSEs or public institutions. Given the costs of external service providers, OiRA was chosen because it does not require any additional direct costs.

Lastly, **familiarity with tools and methods** influenced the decision-making process when selecting an RA method. Being a relatively new tool, OiRA positioned itself in relation to both the methods currently used in the workplace (e.g. RAs delivered by external experts) and the methods that OSH experts had previously used and were experienced with (e.g. more established methods known to experts and labour authorities). Therefore, when choosing a tool, this could also play a role, as OiRA had to present some additional incentives compared to the well-established methods (like those mentioned above) for the person conducting the RA to use it.

Based on these considerations, **two main ways of using OiRA emerged**:

- using OiRA as a stand-alone tool, that is as a method that is utilised to conduct the RA at the whole workplace; and
- using OiRA with other tools, making OiRA one of the tools in the available toolkit of methods.

As the study showed consistently, **OiRA was found to be more suitable for smaller workplaces**. OiRA was used on its own, as it was found to be sufficient for those kinds of working environments. When it was used as a stand-alone method to conduct the RA, specifically in France users reported to have never done an RA before using OiRA. In many other cases, it often either replaced the methods that were previously used in the workplace (e.g. checklists or Excel spreadsheets, France) or services of external service providers (Lithuania). In both of the former instances, the decision was grounded in dissatisfaction (and costs) with the method used at the time. Also, OiRA was used on its own when a

company decided to start conducting RAs, and opted to do so internally and, interestingly, when the external experts suggested it as a suitable solution (Slovenia).

More often, however, in Slovenia, Lithuania, Cyprus and larger enterprises, **OiRA was used with other tools to conduct comprehensive and detailed assessments**. Such an approach stemmed from the factors that played a role in the decision-making process, as presented above. In those instances, OiRA was not used to conduct the RA for the whole workplace, but rather it was supplemented with other methods. While it was not used to conduct the RA on its own, OiRA was reported as an important part of the overall OSH management, improving the workplace safety overall.

The main consideration for using OiRA with other methods was that there was reported **lack of clarity concerning its legal status**, coming from both the questions on the validity of its outputs and the coverage it provided in assessing risks. With other methods that were perceived by the OSH experts as providing the outputs that were recognised as proof of RA, OiRA was not the obvious choice for those interviewees. The experts' familiarity with the other methods also played a role here (especially in Slovenia).

In relation to this, OiRA was understandably not able to **facilitate the physical measurements some workplaces required**, and separately, it did not include modules or tools that interviewees also found to be important based on the national legislation, for example, for assessing manual handling of loads (required by Slovenian legislation) or psychosocial risks (Lithuania). Therefore, it had to be supplemented with other methods or vice versa.

Because in those instances OiRA was not used to conduct the RA on its own, how it was used was also quite different from its more 'traditional' use. For example, OiRA served as an **educational tool** by allowing OSH experts to educate clients about workplace risks while using other methods for formal RAs. Additionally, companies and OSH professionals used OiRA to **enhance their own knowledge** — OiRA pointed them in the direction of risks not previously considered. For those new to OSH, it also served as an invaluable resource for understanding risk management, while more experienced users appreciated how it encouraged them to re-evaluate their existing approaches. Another key use of OiRA was to **cross-check its results** with those of other RA methods, as noted by some interviewees (in Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus). It was also used when other resources fell short — in this instance in the case of the OiRA COVID-19 tool, which was found to fill in the gaps in risk management that other methods or tools had.

As a result of how OiRA is used in practice, the percentage of fully completed assessments (where more than 70% of statements are answered) should be viewed in context. The observation can be made that many users engage with OiRA not necessarily to complete a full RA but to learn, explore and supplement their existing knowledge. **Any level of interaction with OiRA can add considerable value**, so **even if a user completes less than 10% of the statements**, this does not mean they did not benefit significantly from the tool, as they may have used OiRA for their (even narrowly defined) needs.

Regardless of how or why OiRA was used, it was **generally assessed positively by its users**. Overall, OiRA was **praised for its user-friendly layout, clear, accessible language and guidance**. While some users reported a learning curve, OiRA was widely noted to facilitate the RA process, particularly for those with limited OSH experience — such as individuals new to conducting RAs internally or employers in smaller companies. Its structured, easy-to-follow process was especially valuable for its target audience, the needs of which were in mind when OiRA was designed.

Furthermore, OiRA was valued as a **source of the most up-to-date information on legal requirements** for risk management, a benefit tied to its online format. Unlike other tools (especially offline checklists), which were less adaptable, OiRA provided insights into the current legislation, which was highly beneficial for both less and more experienced OSH experts, whether internal or external, supporting more thorough and compliant assessments. Also, OiRA's online nature allowed it to respond dynamically to emerging risks (e.g. during the COVID-19 pandemic), filling a gap left by offline checklist-type assessments, which were less responsive.

Lastly, OiRA was seen as a **flexible method** that allowed users to adapt it to their specific needs, as discussed in this section. Additionally, users reported to adjust the tool by adding risks or measures as necessary (France) and by skipping irrelevant modules. This flexibility enabled users to tailor assessments to their unique situations, pointing to OiRA's adaptability to a range of RA needs.

At the same time, a **few areas for improvement emerged**. Many of these were identified above as reasons behind choosing particular methods for RA; however, some issues also emerged regarding how OiRA is used in practice.

Notably, **OiRA-generated reports received less favourable feedback**, with interviewees reporting uncertainty about their purpose, structure or how to utilise them. This impacted the overall perception of OiRA's usefulness, making it an important area to address.

It also became apparent that **not all OiRA functionalities are either enabled at the national level or well known to users**. Given the importance of OiRA as a flexible tool, this could limit its wider adoption. Ensuring that all available options are visible and understood by users is critical, as some functionalities appear underutilised, as for example the possibility to work on an assessment jointly with various users. Emphasising tool flexibility could further encourage partners to leverage options for adaptability — such as optional modules, softer phrasing of negative statements to suit diverse scenarios, adding profile questions and enabling a 'not applicable' option.

The study revealed OiRA's broader application beyond its original intent, including its active use by external providers. Given that the tool reaches a more diverse audience than originally anticipated offers new and interesting insights. The fact that even OSH experts use OiRA to expand their knowledge underscores its potential reach and relevance across different users.

8.2 Key pointers

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following section outlines areas for improvement, development and future direction for OiRA at the national level. These suggestions should be **considered in the context of national specificities, differences in OSH systems and the particular capabilities of OiRA in each country**. Therefore, while these recommendations aim to assist in planning further enhancements to OiRA, they should be evaluated by the national institutions responsible for the platform, allowing them to assess the feasibility, applicability and suitability of the proposed solutions and directions.

- OiRA should be **further promoted as the online tool to perform RAs**, as in Slovenia, Cyprus and Lithuania, OiRA is recognised as the sole such option and in France it is the only free online tool available for OSH RA. In doing so, highlighting OiRA's ability to be updated in response to new regulatory requirements or unforeseen challenges would promote its value as a forward-looking, flexible and reliable solution.
- OiRA **should continue to be advertised as a free, easily accessible tool, particularly targeting small companies** wishing to conduct RAs internally or those with limited budgets. OiRA should continue being advertised as a tool best suited to MSEs, especially those at the very beginning of their (internally conducted) systematic RA processes.
- It is important to highlight OiRA's **versatility and flexibility**, emphasising that it can be used both on its own and as a supplement to other RA tools, depending on the company's needs, supporting companies in including as little or as much detail as needed.
- Considering that the study findings suggest that the main driver for conducting RAs is to fulfil legal obligations, **OiRA's legal status should be clarified by the national authorities**.
- If the national authorities find that the OiRA-produced documents are not fully in line with what is legally required, they may consider **how to transpose the OiRA outputs into a legally compliant format**.
- Consideration should be given to **developing an approach to the technical and physical aspects**, which are believed not to be covered in OiRA RAs. To address the issue of these technical measurements, actions that could be considered include:
    - Providing clarification in OiRA tools when measurements are required and the scope of these measurements.
    - As has been done in the past, developing specific tools covering specific risks or tasks might help overcome certain gaps in tools at the national level (see the last point).

  - Once clarifications are made and needed modifications applied to the OiRA and its outputs, to be legally compliant, further **promotion and endorsement from the national authorities**, in line with the main drivers for conducting RAs, should follow. Such promotion and endorsement should focus on **OiRA outputs being confirmed to be legally compliant RAs that can be used in case of inspection**. There should be clear and consistent communication regarding OiRA's legal status as an RA tool.

- Given the high reliance on external OSH experts in some of the countries in the study, and in recognition of their role in the OSH system overall, **enabling OiRA's OSH Service feature** at national level could increase its use in certain countries. This feature allows external experts to edit and validate a company's RAs while the company itself has its own log-in and access to all its data and would receive reminders about upcoming messages. Such a feature would give companies/clients more responsibility and insights into their RA process and provide OSH services with smoother collaboration with clients. Consideration could be given to making this feature available in all OiRA tools at the national level and promoting it accordingly.
- Considering this reliance on external service providers, enabling this option requires careful consideration and an appropriate approach. The **buy-in of the OSH service providers is necessary, and they need to be assured that OiRA is a way of improving their services instead of being a possible threat** that might lead to them losing clients.
- **OiRA's collaborative capabilities** to involve workers in the RA process should be promoted. Promoting that workers get access to RA-produced documents can further foster a culture of safety, ownership, transparency and active participation.
- **The 'training feature' for employers and workers** should be considered and promoted at national level. This training feature in OiRA can be enabled at the national level for all tools and enables users to go through the content of a tool via online slides. It can be enhanced by enabling an OSH knowledge quiz based on the information that the tool covers. When users successfully answer the quiz questions, they earn a certificate to show that they have completed this training successfully. When the training feature was developed, this was mostly done bearing in mind that, according to the EU Framework Directive 89/391, employers are obliged to train their workers. However, considering the role of external service providers it seems that this feature might also be useful for engaging employers more fully in the RA process and enhancing their engagement in implementing the proposed solutions.
- Enhancing the quality and usefulness of OiRA-generated reports is key for recognising the tool as a valid alternative to other RA methods. Thought should be given to how to improve the reports for better end user understanding. In this sense, it should be noted that a new report format has been developed during the implementation of this study and is available for OiRA countries to use. Therefore, it might be worth considering this report format for users but also, in parallel, closely following up on user feedback in relation to the new report format.
- In relation to the reports, and how they are used, **OiRA tools should be kept up to date with the latest legislation and emerging workplace risks**, as OiRA was found to be appreciated for delivering such information, and this capability was seen as an asset.
- **Expanding support through additional methods, such as online tutorials**, would further enhance user experience and satisfaction. Consideration should be made at a national level regarding **which functions are currently underutilised**, as the study suggests that several available functions are not known to end users — for example, the possibility to add their own risks and measures, collaborative functions, cloning previously completed assessments to use them as the basis for new ones and so on. This underutilisation and lack of knowledge about these options can be a cause of some negative experiences of users and need to be addressed.
- Consideration could be given to the development of further tools focusing on **specific tasks or areas of OSH concern, rather than on sector-specific tools**. This is because OiRA was found to be lacking some specific tools or modules to assess specific risks, which were found to be

covered by other tools. Therefore, to address those gaps within OiRA, some tools to address these concerns can be developed, targeting, for example, psychosocial risks. This should be considered at a national level, to check which coverage gaps appear and can be addressed in relation to the most popularly used methods.

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