

## SUPPORTING MICRO AND SMALL COMPANIES WITH INTERACTIVE RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS – CONFERENCE

*17 May 2017, Brussels*

Considered as the legacy of the 2008-09 Healthy Workplaces Campaign on risk assessment, the [OiRA project](#) (Online interactive Risk Assessment) was officially launched by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) at the OSH World Congress held in Istanbul in September 2011. Prior to this, discussions with Dutch authorities on the existing [RI&E tool](#) and its tools generator, together with the support of the Dutch Ministry and Social Partners, ETUC, Business Europe and UEAPME, led to the technical development of the OiRA tools generator in 2009. At a later stage, the pilot phase in 2010-11 resulted in the publication of the first OiRA tool at the end of 2011.

As part of the project, the [OiRA community](#) meetings have been held to bring its members together to discuss relevant issues on OiRA and further digital risk assessment tools on an annual basis. The IRAT network, comprising organisations who have developed IT-based risk assessments tools similar to OiRA in Estonia, Ireland, Norway, Netherlands and Spain, have also been invited to join these meetings. Despite the different nature of the tools developed by each, both the OiRA community and the IRAT network share the common challenge of reaching out to micro and small enterprises (MSEs) and making them act.

During the OiRA community meeting held in Lisbon in 2016, it was decided that the following encounter would include, for the first time, a higher level of political involvement, as well as an OiRA/IRAT conference open to interested parties outside of the existing community. Therefore, and as a result of that commitment, the intention of the jointly convened conference between EU-OSHA and the European Commission has been to share information, knowledge and experiences on the reinforcement of online interactive tools to help MSEs through the risk assessment process to improve occupational safety and health (OSH) at the workplace, as well as to plan strategically for the future.



The conference consisted of opening statements from **Maria Teresa Moitinho**, on behalf of the European Commission (Unit B3, Health and Safety - DG EMPL) and **Dr Christa Sedlatschek**, Director of EU-OSHA. This was followed by two presentations from EU-OSHA on the findings of the SESAME project, and on the OiRA state-of-play from an Agency perspective, focusing on its future challenges. After that, partners in the field who use interactive tools had the floor to deliver their presentations and shared their own experiences.

Finally, a round table with governments', workers' and employers' representatives took place, with the opportunity for the audience to ask questions. The closing keynote was delivered by **Giacomo Mattinò**, Head of Unit, DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs.

The first part of the conference was moderated by **Brenda O'Brien**, Manager of the Brussels Liaison Office (EU-OSHA) and the round table by **William Cockburn**, Head of the Prevention and Research Unit of EU-OSHA.

The conference was covered live on Twitter with the hashtag '#OiRAtools'.

## Opening statements

The conference was opened by **Maria Teresa Moitinho**, who stressed the importance of the OiRA project in supporting the work of the European Commission within the EU OSH Framework. She referred to the *Ex-post evaluation*<sup>1</sup> to underline the lack of awareness, expertise and resources among MSEs to comply with OSH obligations, and outlined the need for financial and technical support, as well as the added value of interactive risk assessment (IRA) tools to help with compliance.

As the *Communication from the Commission*<sup>2</sup> reflects the key role played by the IRA tools in the implementation of OSH legislation among MSEs, Ms Moitinho also highlighted the importance of the conference for four reasons:

- 1) Bringing visibility to the tools;
- 2) Fostering better OSH understanding among MSEs;
- 3) Better identification and assessment of drivers and obstacles for implementation of risk assessment;
- 4) Better knowledge of target audiences and good practice examples.

She concluded with a reminder to the audience of the Commission's support to MSEs through a series of mutual learning experiences, including a complementary conference, which will be held in Dublin in October 2017. The event will count on the participation of EU-OSHA and it will be focused on sharing experiences among countries and on further exploring how to improve e-tools.



**Dr Christa Sedlatschek** reviewed the background and development of the OiRA project and highlighted the role of risk assessment as the cornerstone of proper occupational health and safety management. She also raised the importance of the project, not only for the Agency, but also for the work of the European Commission and for the European economy and MSEs in general. She gave an overview of the agenda and launched two key messages to the audience:

- 1) The need to promote the work done and underway, expanding the role of the Agency as facilitator;
- 2) EU-OSHA's long term commitment to the MSEs' needs and the people employed by them.

<sup>1</sup> Ex-post evaluation of the European Union occupational safety and health Directives (REFIT evaluation): [www.ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16875&langId=en](http://www.ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16875&langId=en)

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016SC0400>

## Challenges and findings for MSEs and OSH (OiRA & SESAME project)

### Perspective and input by EU-OSHA

**William Cockburn** argued the preventive approach of interactive risk assessment tools through the mobilisation of a series of successful mechanisms to improve OSH standards among MSEs, highlighting the key role played by OSH and non-OSH intermediaries and by incentives. Apart from the tools themselves, he also pointed out other mechanisms for MSEs to have a more proactive approach to OSH. These include regulation, information provision, awareness-raising, training actions and adaptation to the specific sectors.

The new findings of the ongoing four-year SESAME project (Safe Small and Micro Enterprises) presented by Mr Cockburn showed a mixed OSH picture among MSEs (as it is their nature) and a scenario where a substantial proportion of work in MSEs takes places in firms which are typical of those pursuing 'low road survival strategies' in high risk industries. The project's outcomes also revealed a 'general and multifaceted lack of resources', which determine poor OSH in MSEs. This result was linked to the notion that, within a social and economic context where new regulatory approaches and wider forms of labour relations have emerged, action at different levels is needed.



**Andrew Smith** (Head of the Communication and Promotion Unit of EU-OSHA) explained the 'OiRA journey' from 2009 to the present, focusing on the role and actions carried out by EU-OSHA to support the implementation of OiRA tools in the field. He emphasised the OiRA project monitoring (through statistics, quantitative and qualitative indicators and feedback from intermediaries) to assess EU-OSHA's performance and achievements, as well as the evidence from OiRA and SESAME showing that to better reach MSEs more efforts and resources are needed.

Despite the limited scope of direct influence on the actual number of risk assessments carried out by MSEs, Mr Smith argued that EU-OSHA targets its resources at helping to create the environment in which that can happen. This involves communication and promotion actions, including new products (i.e. toolkit and new website) and events/media supportive activities (i.e. the conference) aimed at intermediaries to support MSEs. These actions are carried out at both EU and national policy levels to support the OiRA community, IRA tools developers, partners, as well as all the stakeholders / OSH actors dealing with MSEs.

## Learning experiences from users of interactive risk assessment tools in the field

### Presentations by OiRA / IRAT Partners

**Séverine Brunet** (INRS) portrayed the mobilisation of MSEs as one of the main challenges for OSH professionals in France. She presented the statistical evaluation and the collected feedback about OiRA in the country, showing how the tool suits the needs of MSEs in France. The results also underlined the need to promote OiRA and to encourage companies to do their risk assessments. Ms Brunet also highlighted the great contribution of integrated OiRA/IRA tools to both national programmes and sectoral contexts and how the development of similar OiRA tools has been included in the French OSH



Plan 2007- 2020 (*Plan Santé au Travail 2017-2020*) as one of the top priorities for OSH prevention within SMEs.

**Stefano Martinelli** (DG EMPL - Social Dialogue) tackled the approach for OSH improvement in MSEs from the European Sectoral Social Dialogue perspective. He highlighted its diversity and outcomes, as well as its added value in terms of reaching sectoral agreements (binding and non-binding) and the influence of social partners when it comes to negotiate, develop and implement EU legislation. The role of OiRA and the added value of the tools developed across the different sectors were also emphasised.

**Gustavo González-Quijano** (COTANCE) presented the example of the leather & tanning sector and its first OiRA tool published in 2013, together with trade unions (industriAll), at the EU level, and which is currently under revision. He referred to the new emerging risks in the sector, as a result of the technological advances and the adaptation to new legislation, underlining the tools' contribution to raise the EU standards on OSH within the sector. To illustrate this, Mr González-Quijano referred to the recently launched *Due Diligence for Healthy Workplaces in the Tanning Industry* project in partnership with industriAll. The initiative aims to update the OiRA tool for the tanning sector and to conduct an EU survey on current practices for the identification and reporting of concerns regarding workplace health and safety conditions in tanneries along the leather value chain.

**Following the presentations by OiRA partners, Ireland and Norway, members of the IRAT network, presented their own interactive tools designed over the years outside of the OiRA project framework.**

**Martin O'Dea** (Health and Safety Authority) focused on the main features of the BeSMART.ie - Business electronic Safety Management and Risk Assessment Tool and its contribution to small businesses in Ireland. The tool has been designed to help small business' owners/managers to prepare risk assessments and a safety statement for their workplaces. It currently covers 281 business types across six sectors – manufacturing, construction, services, retail, agribusiness and hospitality. Mr O'Dea highlighted the following key messages about BeSMART.ie:

- 1) Improve safety and health;
- 2) Save money;
- 3) Reduce paperwork;
- 4) Comply with the law.



**Lisa Falch Nilsen** (Arbeidstilsynet) presented the Risikovurderingsverktøy tool, outlining the main reasons for developing it. In Norway, there are approximately 250, 000 businesses, 95% of which are MSEs. The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority had previously identified poor OSH knowledge among MSEs, in terms of internal control regulations, OSH professionals and a lack of risk

assessments. Due to the specific needs of the country, it was decided to develop a new IRA tool outside of the OiRA project framework. Ms Falch Nilsen also highlighted the importance of the inclusive design of the tool (accessible for people with special needs) and the promotion strategies. The tool launch is foreseen for January 2018 and it will cover the cleaning, transport and hairdressing sectors initially. Its objective is to help MSEs to comply with the law and to motivate them to improve OSH efficiency.

## Towards an effective OSH reinforcement within MSEs through digital tools

### Round table among governments', workers' and employers' representatives: reinforcing MSEs and OSH with digital tools

**Maria Teresa Moitinho**, European Commission's representative, stressed the need to build up a 'culture of prevention' at the workplace level to make the implementation of OSH legislation more effective. She reiterated the need to support and reinforce digital tools with the involvement of OSH and non OSH actors (social partners), as well as to set up cross-cutting approaches extended to other policy areas (public health, education, etc.) for better results. The national strategies to frame the IRA tools and the adaptation and integration of them to national contexts were raised as key elements to reduce the perception of the costs and of OSH as a burden.

**Liliane Volozinskis**, Director for Social Policy and Vocational Training at UEAPME, welcomed the specific focus on micro companies (around 92 % of EU SMEs are classified as micro companies), in terms of risk assessment and OSH obligations. She recognised the added value of OiRA at national level but also stressed its complexity for SMEs due to the difficulty of its content, the lack of specific sectoral OiRA tools available in national languages and the duration of the risk assessment evaluation. She also highlighted the development of such tools, more adapted to their specific needs, by members of UEAPME.

**Rik van Steenbergen**, Policy Advisor at the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV), outlined the usefulness of tools like OiRA to improve OSH conditions among (non-unionised) MSEs and the low compliance. In the Netherlands, less than 50 % of companies with one or two workers carry out a risk assessment and 75 % of businesses do not know about the obligation. Despite this, 188 sectoral tools currently exist in the country (most of them RI&E tools). In order to raise awareness about the importance of risk assessment, a thematic week is organised every year in the Netherlands. Mr van Steenberg concluded his intervention adding that a balance must be struck between simplicity and compliance.



**Renars Lusis**, Director of the State Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Latvia, highlighted the active role of Latvia in the use of OiRA tools. He raised the importance of investing time and support in the development of the tools in return of future benefits for companies and the country as a whole. He stressed that while competitiveness

is important for Latvia, compliance and consultation are key elements as well. Mr Lusis also added the general perception of OiRA as an effective way to support and improve OSH in Latvian MSEs.

**Kris De Meester**, Manager of Health & Safety Affairs at the Federation de Enterprises in Belgium (VBO), pointed out that compliance should not be the only driver and referred to the legal framework as a means to achieve OSH improvements but not as a goal in itself.

He stressed the need to strike a balance between efficiency and effectiveness and argued that the success of digital tools is subject to the number of users and the engagement of companies. He also recognised the added value of OiRA in spreading OSH information and reaching all users (i.e. if a new product has specific risks for a particular sector).

**Dr. Monique Ramioul**, Professor at KU Leuven and project coordinator of the SESAME project, stressed that raising awareness about risk assessment and prevention is a process where OSH management should be involved. She also outlined some common aspects applicable to MSEs, including vulnerability, business-stability, close/personal relations between management and staff, little experience or accidents and risks (common sense not always prevent accidents), and little interest in enlarging OSH knowledge. She added that this combination leads to the identification of three types of MSEs:

- 1) **Avoiders**: No compliance with the law (survival as main concern);
- 2) **Reactive companies**: compliance because of legal obligation or specific demand from workers (not active in the use of tools or other elements at their disposal);
- 3) **Proactive companies**: more important but difficult to reach.

Finally, the audience asked the panel questions on compliance as the main driver for developing tools, external OSH services and the future of OSH within MSEs.

## Closing keynote

Closing keynote was made by **Giacomo Mattinò**, Head of Unit, DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, who highlighted the role of Enterprise Europe Network in supporting SMEs. Mr Mattinò emphasised the challenge of reaching out to SMEs, in terms of raising awareness about OSH but also to help them become more competitive. To illustrate this, he referred to the link between OSH, competitiveness and productivity, stressing the importance of building up new partnerships with other organisations in order to reach those challenges.

## Closing remarks

Concluding remarks were made by Dr Christa Sedlatschek, Director of EU-OSHA, who briefly highlighted the main points discussed during the conference and thanked all the participants for their attendance, feedback and input.

