

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

# Risk assessment using OiRA at French workplaces: a qualitative study

Report



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## List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Organisation name and English translation
<b>Anact</b>	Agence nationale pour l'amélioration des conditions de travail (The French national agency for the improvement of working conditions)
<b>BDESE</b>	Base de données économiques, sociales et environnementales (Economic, social and environmental database)
<b>CARSAT</b>	Caisse d'assurance retraite et de la santé au travail (Occupational health and pension insurance funds)
<b>CHSCT</b>	Comité d'hygiène, de sécurité et des conditions de travail (Health, safety and working conditions committee)
<b>CNAMTS</b>	Caisse nationale d'assurance maladie des travailleurs salariés (National health insurance fund for salaried workers)
<b>CSE</b>	Comité social et économique (Economic and social committee)
<b>CGSS</b>	Caisse générale de sécurité sociale (The national social security fund)
<b>DARES</b>	Direction de l'animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques (The research, studies and statistics directorate)
<b>DIRECCTE</b>	Direction régionale des entreprises, de la concurrence, de la consommation, du travail et de l'emploi
<b>DREETS</b>	Direction régionale de l'économie, de l'emploi, du travail et des solidarités (Regional directorate of economy, employment, labour and solidarity)
<b>DUERP/DUER</b>	Document unique d'évaluation des risques professionnels (occupational risk assessment document ('document unique') that should be established and updated at least once a year)
<b>DUP</b>	Délégation unique du personnel (Sole employee representative body)
<b>FCSF</b>	Fédération des centres sociaux et socioculturels de France (Federation of social and socio-cultural centres of France)
<b>FFB</b>	Fédération française du bâtiment (French building federation)
<b>FNPAT</b>	Fonds national de prévention des accidents du travail et des maladies professionnelles (National fund for the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases)
<b>FPI</b>	Fédération des Promoteurs Immobiliers de France (Federation of property developers of France)
<b>IMP</b>	Institut Maritime de Prévention (Maritime prevention institute)
<b>INRS</b>	Institut national de recherche et sécurité (French research and safety institute for the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases)
<b>IRP</b>	Instances représentative du personnel (Staff representative body)

Abbreviation	Organisation name and English translation
<b>IRSN</b>	Institut de radioprotection et de sûreté nucléaire (The radioprotection and nuclear safety institute)
<b>OHA</b>	Assistante santé au travail (Occupational health assistant)
<b>OPPBTP</b>	Organisme professionnel de prévention du bâtiment et des travaux publics (Professional agency for risk prevention in building and civil engineering)
<b>OSTRA</b>	Objectif santé travail (an occupational health service)
<b>PST</b>	Plan santé au travail (The national occupational health plan)
<b>SPST</b>	Services de prévention et de santé au travail (Occupational health and prevention services)
<b>URSAFF</b>	Union de recouvrement des cotisations de sécurité sociale et d'allocations familiales (Union for the collection of social security and family allowance contributions)

## List of institutions and platforms

Améli (health insurance official website)
Assurance Maladie (Health insurance)
FranceConnect (Identification and authentication service)
Légifrance (official website for diffusion of legislative and regulatory texts and court decisions of the Supreme and appeal courts of French law)
Médecine du Travail (Occupational medicine)
Ministère du Travail (Ministry of Labour)
Pôle emploi (Employment office)
Sécurité Sociale (Social security)
Travail et sécurité (the monthly magazine published by INRS)
FranceConnect (a government online identification and authentication service)
L'inspection du travail (Labour Inspectorate)

## Executive summary

### About the Study

This summary contains insights from a qualitative research study examining risk assessment processes in micro and small enterprises (MSEs) that have been carried out using tools on the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work's (EU-OSHA) Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) platform, as well as other ways of approaching the risk assessment and management process, such as other interactive tools, or offline approaches such as Excel sheets. The study provides information about how risk management is shaped by the use of online interactive risk assessment tools and specifically by OiRA. It is based on fieldwork carried out in France in 2021 and 2022, building on findings from 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews among MSEs.

The [OiRA application](#) was launched by EU-OSHA in 2011. OiRA aims to help relevant stakeholders in EU Member States develop user-friendly online risk assessment tools adapted to the specific national and sectoral context, which are then promoted to MSEs for use free of charge. OiRA is an online platform that consists of the OiRA tools generator where developers/national partners can create sectoral tools and the OiRA sectoral tools, which are accessible for everyone through an interactive website. The tools mostly follow the logic of tasks and activities performed at companies in specific sectors rather than one of risks. As such, they facilitate intuitive use also by people not skilled in risk assessments. OiRA proposes a stepwise approach from hazard identification to a documented risk assessment. End users, who may never have carried out a risk assessment before, are guided through the process and taken from the first step (risk identification) to the final step (making an action plan/creating a documented risk assessment). The guiding principle is that OiRA should serve as a way of demystifying the process of risk assessment by giving companies concrete guidance on every step that needs to be taken to implement a proper risk assessment.

The French OiRA tools are integrated into a larger occupational safety and health (OSH) infrastructure, with sectoral partners and several institutions contributing to both the development and dissemination of these user-friendly and free tools.

### Comparative findings

The three groups represented in the study — OiRA users, companies using other online interactive tools and those using Excel sheets — share many similar traits in terms of their motivations, challenges and approaches to risk assessments. However, significant differences can be also observed.

#### *Motivation for systematic risk assessment*

For OiRA users, the **need to comply with legal obligations in the area of OSH** and the desire to **ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of employees stand out as key motivators for carrying out systematic risk assessment**. Further, these companies reported the need to reduce and avoid accidents at work, which is also highlighted from the perspective of ensuring productivity at the company, the need to reduce absence levels, and the financial savings resulting from the avoidance of accidents, which are costly for employers. The need to foster a culture of OSH compliance was also highlighted.

Companies opting for offline approaches to risk assessment also reported similar motivating factors. They also highlighted first and foremost **the need to comply with legal requirements**, followed by the **need to care for the health, safety and wellbeing of employees**.

It is interesting to note that **the order of motivating factors is different for companies using online tools other than OiRA**. Here, the primary reason was to **avoid accidents and ensure the safety of employees**. The legal obligation to carry out risk assessments, while acknowledged, does not occupy a primary place in terms of motivating factors.

#### *Reasons to select a specific risk assessment approach*

When selecting specific risk assessment approaches or tools, several aspects were taken into consideration by employers. These can be broadly categorised as:

- issues related to functionality, that is, reflecting the needs of the employer;

- issues related to legitimacy; and
- issues related to availability of external support.

**In terms of functionality**, all companies reported seeking or appreciating a number of essential elements in their selected approaches. These included a simple, **intuitive and user-friendly set-up** for the risk assessment tool, highlighted mostly by the OiRA users in the sample, the availability of a **well-rounded risk assessment approach canvas**, which was important for the OiRA users, or a tool that could be **integrated into the company's overall management software**, a view that was largely represented in the group using other online approaches. This latter element is associated with multiple functionalities such as a direct connection to the human resources segments of the tool or to the finance department.

An approach to risk assessment that is **adapted to the company's needs and circumstances** is considered to be one of the key elements for selecting and continuing with a chosen approach. However, the research found that this means different things for different groups. For example, some feel that this need is fulfilled by OiRA, through the fact that OiRA is sector specific. By contrast, others – mainly the group relying on Excel sheets/offline tools – remain faithful to reliance on external support as this is provided by services that are familiar with the company's line of work. The two companies that opted for industry-specific online tools other than OiRA do so as they feel those tools are very well adjusted to their work, needs and risks.

**The issue of legitimacy can be approached in two ways.** On the one hand, there is the legitimacy of the tool/approach considered, as highlighted in the OiRA group, which comes from the fact that **public authorities are the authors/developers of the tools**. France's National Institute of Research and Security (INRS) is particularly involved in this regard. Legitimacy also results from **recommendations from OSH experts** such as occupational medicine services or **business partners and colleagues** who have tested the tool and recommend it based on their experience. All these **different forms of endorsement are important and are listed as factors that have contributed to the selection of OiRA as a tool of choice**. On the other hand, there is the question of objectivity and legitimacy of risk assessment results. This aspect is highlighted largely by companies using external services to carry out or verify their risk assessments. Here, the study found that the sense of legitimacy arising from using the expertise of external experts to carry out or verify risk assessments was paramount.

Lastly, **availability of support** is a strong factor in terms of supporting the selection and continuation of certain approaches. This support takes the form of on-site visits by external OSH experts (public services, OSH service providers) or help in developing Excel grids. Equally, within the group of companies using other software solutions, support to set up and operate the software was highlighted as important. For the OiRA group, the available support from INRS was highlighted as a significant factor.

The sector in which a company operates is key when looking into the extent to which a specific tool is tailored to the needs of a company. These needs are to some extent reported as being fully met by OiRA, while other companies prefer the support of external OSH services as these have experts with hands-on experience in the sector. Lastly, in the case of OiRA specifically, the fact that the tool is recommended by business partners and colleagues' points to the potential importance of sectoral connections.

### ***Challenges to systematic risk assessment***

In terms of carrying out the risk assessment itself, challenges cited in the interviews carried out for this study include a **lack of time**. In particular, companies using the Excel spreadsheet approach described this as time-consuming and one of the reasons to switch to OiRA. Another challenge identified by interviewees was **insufficient information about available tools, resources and solutions**. While companies listed numerous sources of information about OSH, including the Internet, dedicated journals, newsletters and – importantly – OSH experts, a sense of lack of trustworthy, exhaustive knowledge of the topic surfaced from several interviews. On the one hand, companies felt that they needed to glean information from many different sources, but on the other hand several reported that they did not feel they had enough information on how to select the best approach to risk assessment. OiRA was mentioned as bringing all information together very well.

Starker differences surface in terms of **understanding the essence of risk assessment** specifically, rather than OSH generally. Here, it is evident that companies using OiRA stand out as having a clear grasp of the purpose and elements of risk assessment, set out within the OiRA framework. By contrast, there are companies in the two other groups that appear to have a somewhat mixed and blurred understanding of the exact nature of risk assessment. Some see this as integrated into the larger business risk assessment process, which includes examining issues such as delays in projects or financial risks. This type of approach is beneficial on a long-term basis as embedding risk assessment into the overall business operation of a company is desirable, as long as the health and safety of employees is given sufficient attention rather than being perceived largely as sitting within the business costs framework. Other interviewees referred to risk assessment as the collection of aggregated data about issues such as sickness absence.

By contrast, therefore, **the group of companies using OiRA offers the most coherent and adequate understanding of risk assessment**. It can be assumed that since for many of these companies OiRA is the first tool that they have used and their first systematic risk assessment experience, their good understanding of the risk assessment process and follow-up procedures stems from their learning experience with OiRA. For those switching to OiRA from dedicated Excel tables, although they might have had basic knowledge already, this seems to have been further expanded by OiRA. For example, this group noted that they had discovered new aspects of OSH due to OiRA, or that they had not been aware of the need for an action plan before starting to use OiRA.

**A lack of employee involvement in OSH** and related challenges in terms of **raising awareness of OSH among the employees** was cited by a number of interviewees across the three groups. To this end, the issue of perceiving OSH as something that is carried out by managers for the good of the business rather than for employees was mentioned both by a representative of a company using an online tool and one relying on Excel/external consultants. There was a view that limited involvement of employees leads to limited ownership of the risk assessment process and limits the information available to conduct a risk assessment properly. If employees are not invited to contribute on the basis of their workplace knowledge and/or do not feel motivated to implement and adhere to the measures in place, OSH in the company cannot be implemented to the highest standards.

## Views on OiRA

The largest sample in the study consisted of companies using OiRA as their primary risk assessment tool. This sample comprised enterprises with varying levels of experience with OiRA, including those that have been using OiRA repeatedly over several years, relative newcomers who had completed just one risk assessment and one company that had just started its first risk assessment. Companies in the sample said that they **became aware of OiRA** through the following key channels: the Internet, recommendations from OSH specialists, and through word of mouth such as recommendations from colleagues and business partners.

OiRA was selected in most cases by the managers or the employees tasked with carrying out risk assessments. In one case, only the employees were consulted about the selection of the tool. The decision was largely made by the managers alone, or in cases where it was proposed by the employees, the decision was validated by management. When asked to reflect on what initially attracted them to OiRA and motivated them to test this tool, interviewees cited different reasons. These included **OiRA's legitimacy and endorsement by the public authorities**, which makes it trustworthy and gives assurance that it will cover everything that is needed in a risk assessment. Other reasons are related to the structure of OiRA, the fact that it is **available for different sectors and that it is easy to use**. Prior to using OiRA, companies either used Excel spreadsheets or had no systematic risk assessment in place at all. For all except one interviewee, OiRA was the first online tool that they had used.

Several specific key strengths and positive aspects of OiRA surfaced across the interviews with an observable level of consistency. The key cited assets of OiRA included **simplicity and being intuitive, the usefulness of the action plan** and the fact that it **provides a good structure to risk assessment**. None of the interviewees had a negative opinion about this tool. However, most of the interviewees could not compare OiRA to other software or online tools as they had mostly either not used any different approaches or had relied on Excel spreadsheets or paper-based tools.

Overall, OiRA is judged to be a very useful and efficient tool, offering many strengths and clear added value. The tool was assessed by interviewees as being easy to learn and easy to implement. None of

the companies reported any significant problems in terms of using OiRA. However, some minor technical issues were cited by a few interviewees.

Overall, OiRA is appreciated as a tool that helps to **raise awareness and strengthen a systematic approach** to risk management, especially among companies that did not have a risk assessment approach in place before using OiRA. Companies reported that carrying out a risk assessment using OiRA enabled them to understand risks that they had not thought of before, to acquire a great deal of knowledge about OSH without much effort and to think beyond the identification of risk. Some companies commented that the tool supports an easy follow-up with an action plan, something that they would not otherwise have considered to be part of the risk assessment process.

Generally, the availability of an action plan was widely appreciated throughout the sample of interviewees. The action plan was judged to **correspond well to the identified risks**. Interviewees also welcomed the fact that the action plan was **very precise, going beyond their expectations**. Companies also appreciated the **motivating value** of the action plan.

Interviewees also felt that OiRA **helps to improve awareness** of risk prevention of the person who uses it, and that by making the report and action plan available to employees, OiRA helps companies to be more transparent. Interviewees also noted that since OiRA can be implemented internally without the help of external services, this **encourages better ownership of risk assessment**. The fact that OiRA is easy to use also encouraged users to **revisit the tool rather than just using it once**.

Another aspect of OiRA was that it was highly appreciated as being helpful in **engaging employees in the risk assessment process**. There was a sense that the interviewees using OiRA were very much prepared to engage employees. They reported that the tool and its systematic approach made employee involvement in risk assessment easier compared to previous approaches and that the report and action plan helped to raise awareness of OSH within the workforce.

Finally, users appreciated OiRA's structure, which is **conducive to a well-rounded risk assessment process**. Interviewees noted that thanks to OiRA, risk assessment within the company was more structured and organised because the **work is already prepared**, meaning that the company just needs to answer the questions set out in the tool. They also noted that OiRA allows for 'more **practicality, more organisation, and more automation** regarding the reporting'. Interviewees said that they plan to continue using OiRA and that they would or already have recommended it to others.

This study shows several areas in which OiRA could be improved, although some of these, as is usual with this kind of research, are contradictory. However, all of them seem to be minor, with none dramatically altering the general concept of OiRA. The fact that there is mixed feedback about the level of information provided, with some companies finding this to be just right while others would like more or less information, indicates that most users might be happy with the current middle level of detail provided.

It seems that companies that are often willing to pay a significant amount for their risk assessment tools see clear reasons for doing so. The argument of firms that they want to have modules of their general management systems dedicated to OSH and integrated into the overall software architecture is a valid one and OiRA has not been developed to perform this function. On the contrary, OiRA has been created to reach those who do not know where to start in terms of conducting a risk assessment.

## Conclusions and key pointers

This study shows that OiRA reaches the target group for which it was created and provides an easy start with regard to risk assessment to those who have not previously engaged with this topic. Many of the companies using OiRA either did not have any systematic risk assessment system in place previously or they were working with time-consuming, inefficient Excel spreadsheets and paper-based tools. Therefore, it can be argued that **OiRA paved the way for many companies to embark on a long-term sustainable risk assessment path**.

Considering the findings of the study, a set of recommendations has been developed, addressing mainly OiRA national partners in terms of how to best approach and support companies for better use of OiRA.

### ***On approaching companies and promoting OiRA***

- OiRA should continue to be advertised as a tool best suited to MSEs especially those at the very beginning of their systematic risk assessment processes. Highlighting the tool's user-friendliness, intuitive approach, and ability to structure the risk assessment process in a timesaving and sector specific manner will help to engage new companies.
- Promoting the fact that OiRA is developed and/or endorsed by national public authorities enhances the tool's legitimacy and appeal and is seen as a guarantee of its quality and respectability. This can be important especially in countries where a wide range of online risk assessment tools are available and companies may struggle to choose wisely. Equally, the fact that OiRA can serve as a proof of a completed risk assessment should also be promoted.
- Highlighting the fact that OiRA tools are developed in close collaboration with social and industry partners and therefore reflect the circumstances of different sectors is key to promoting the tool as context specific. This enhances understanding that OiRA is not generic and may encourage companies to try OiRA.
- OiRA is highly recommended by its users and often reaches companies through word of mouth, personal recommendation and a snowballing effect. This is a clear asset and could be further capitalised upon by actively encouraging users to spread the word among their contacts.
- Companies report learning about OSH overall, and risk assessment approaches specifically, mostly online through dedicated government websites and magazines. These channels should be considered as a priority for further promotion of OiRA.
- Companies carry out Internet research to find information about OSH and risk assessment. Making sure that OiRA information appears high on the results list of Internet search engines can significantly help to promote it.
- The fact that OiRA proposes practical measures on how to follow up on the risk assessment is highly valued by companies. The availability of an action plan within OiRA is a clear advantage and deserves highlighting as a practical way to structure further OSH work.
- Comprehensiveness of information must be clearly weighted against the time users need to invest in order to go through the tool.
- Aspects that allow OiRA to be targeted to a company's needs, such as optional modules or profile questions, which lead to certain aspects of the tool being considered or not, seem to be appreciated by users and should be considered in all further developments of OiRA.
- Beyond the OiRA tool itself, this study revealed the need for and appreciation of direct external support in carrying out risk assessments, not only among the OiRA users but all the groups in this study. Embedding this in some way within the respective national OiRA frameworks could be considered, either through offering direct chat support on the OiRA website or linking OiRA with existing public OSH services. Exploring collaboration with private OSH services could also be considered, within the context of providing better support to companies to enable them to engage in effective risk assessment.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and rationale for the study

This study was carried out to explore the use of Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tools in companies compared to other ways of conducting a risk assessment (RA). Specifically, the objective has been to properly capture the factors associated with effective management of risks, with a focus on the approach(es) taken by the micro and small enterprises (MSEs) supported by OiRA or other online tools. For this purpose, an in-depth, qualitative study was selected as the relevant approach, centring on gathering views, opinions and ideas from a relatively small sample of companies (40 in total), but with the benefit of engaging in dialogue and exchange that such methodology provides. This was necessary to enable the study to understand why and how companies opt for specific RA approaches, and the benefit that this brings them.

The project gave insights into how OiRA (and other approaches) can support the RA and management process in MSEs, including what obstacles companies face and what factors encourage them to use online (OiRA) or offline tools. The report includes insights into RA processes in MSEs conducted with OiRA and other ways of approaching the RA and management process (such as other interactive tools, or offline approaches such as Excel sheets), providing information about how risk management is shaped by the use of online interactive RA tools and specifically by OiRA.

## 1.2 About OiRA

The [OiRA](#) application was launched by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) in 2011. OiRA aims to help relevant stakeholders in EU Member States to develop user-friendly online RA tools adapted to the specific national and sectoral context, which are then promoted to MSEs for use free of charge. OiRA is an online platform that consists of the OiRA tool generator (where developers/national partners can create sectoral tools) and the OiRA sectoral tools, which are accessible through an interactive website. The tools follow the logic of tasks and activities performed at companies in specific sectors rather than one of risks, facilitating intuitive use also by people not skilled in RA. OiRA proposes a stepwise approach, from hazard identification to a documented RA. End users, who may never have carried out an RA before, are guided through the process and taken from the first step (risk identification) to the last (making an action plan / creating a documented RA).

The OiRA tool generator is provided free of charge to sectoral partners at EU level, and to EU and national authorities (the official OiRA partners). Sectoral partners at EU or national level and EU or national authorities (the developers of the tools) can use the OiRA tool generator to create RA tools for different sectors, for example, the hairdressing sector. These tools — OiRA sectoral tools — are then made available for MSEs to carry out their own RA. The goal is to enable MSEs that have never assessed risks, or have never done so in a systematic and structured way, to take the first steps in this respect. Easy access, easy to use and free are preconditions for the success of OiRA tools.

OiRA responds to objectives at the European, national and company level. It has been created to increase the number of MSEs in Europe assessing and managing their occupational risks and, as such, to contribute (through proper RA) to reducing the number of occupational accidents and diseases, and to improving working conditions. Additionally, OiRA wants to help enterprises to become more competitive (by cutting costs arising from occupation accidents and illness, reducing rates of sick leave, etc.).

At company level, the objective is to ensure the safety and health of workers by encouraging the use of OiRA tools at company and shop floor levels, thereby putting in place a sound RA and management process. The idea is that OiRA demystifies the process of RA by giving companies concrete guidance on every step that needs to be taken for implementing a proper RA.

In France, the National Research and Safety Institute (INRS)<sup>1</sup> is the national OiRA partner. INRS is financed by the National Fund for the Prevention of Occupational Accidents and Diseases (FNPAT), which is managed by the French social security authorities. At around the same time that EU-OSHA launched the OiRA application, the French social security authorities and INRS were considering new ways in which to engage MSEs in improving their approach to workplace RA. Internal feedback from a small number of MSEs showed that engagement with risk management practices was low, as also confirmed by data from the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER 2019) showing that 56.9% of companies engage in regular RA practice and this number goes down to 48.1% when looking at companies with 5-9 employees. Many organisations did not carry out RA at all.<sup>2</sup> The OiRA activity was therefore viewed as a good method to begin exploring this new approach. Between 2016 and 2022, INRS published a total of 41 OiRA tools in collaboration with the French social security authorities.

France was selected for this study as it has the largest number of OiRA users compared to other partners (around one-third of all OiRA users are from France). The French OiRA toolbox is integrated within a larger occupational safety and health (OSH) infrastructure, with sectoral partners and institutions contributing to both the dissemination and development of these user-friendly and free tools, the use of which remains voluntary. To date, there are more than 65,000 users and more than 100,000 RAs<sup>3</sup> carried out by French users. France is also one of the Member States that specifically references OiRA in its key strategic documents on OSH.

### 1.3 The French OSH context

The EU health and safety Framework Directive 89/391<sup>4</sup> is the most important piece of European legislation regarding OSH. It lays down general principles concerning the prevention and protection of workers against occupational accidents and diseases, including the obligation for all employers to conduct a health and safety RA. It has been transposed into French law by incorporation in the French Labour Code and the Public Health Code, with social partners at different levels developing provisions within this framework.<sup>5</sup> Employers, according to the law in France, are under strict obligation to protect workers and are liable for guaranteeing the effectiveness of measures.<sup>6</sup> Employers must develop a written RA document (*Document unique d'évaluation des risques professionnels*, DUERP/DUER), in any format (online, paper-based, etc.), and update it annually. The French Labour Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring measures to prevent occupational risks as well as supporting the implementation of prevention measures. The absence of a written RA document or failure to update it, is punishable by a fine of €1,500 to €7,500. Without an RA document, in the event of an accident at work, the employer may be obliged to pay compensation and/or damages.

France has a dual system of occupational accidents and disease prevention. At the national level, the Ministry of Labour is responsible for developing and implementing legislation and regulations. It defines and coordinates the government's OSH policies, particularly through the PST (national occupational health plan). On the other hand, the Occupational Risk Directorate of Social Security is responsible for social security issues. It defines prevention measures and resources and guarantees compensation to victims of occupational accidents and diseases.

Both national bodies oversee institutions that operate in the field and/or on the regional level. The Ministry of Labour supervises occupational health inspectorates and labour inspectorates. These

<sup>1</sup> The INRS official website is available at: <https://en.inrs.fr/>

<sup>2</sup> EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Factors for success: development and promotion of French OiRA tools*, 2021. Available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/factors-success-development-and-promotion-french-oir-tools>

<sup>3</sup> Numbers from 20 September 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:31989L0391&from=EN>

<sup>5</sup> EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *France - Safety and Health in Micro and Small Enterprises in the EU: the view from the workplace*, 2018. Available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/france-safety-and-health-micro-and-small-enterprises-eu-view-workplace>

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organisation, LEGOSH Occupational Health and Safety (OSH), Country profile: France. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/legosh/en/f?p=14100:1100:0::NO::P1100\\_ISO\\_CODE3,P1100\\_SUBCODE\\_CODE,P1100\\_YEAR:FRA,,2015](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/legosh/en/f?p=14100:1100:0::NO::P1100_ISO_CODE3,P1100_SUBCODE_CODE,P1100_YEAR:FRA,,2015)

organisations enforce the Labour Code, particularly in the prevention of occupational risks. The Occupational Risk Directorate of Social Security at the regional level acts through the Prevention Services of Social Security (CARSAT and CGSS in overseas departments). These bodies are in direct contact with companies and with the occupational health services in the regions.

Additionally, the French prevention system involves several technical, scientific and intergovernmental structures. For example, occupational medicine is placed under the control of the state, subject to approval by an interministerial regional authority (the DIRECCTE, Direction Régionale des Entreprises, de la Concurrence, de la Consommation, du Travail et de l'Emploi). Other organisations can be state agencies or private organisations financed by health insurance or professional organisations to provide them with expertise and resources to deploy prevention actions. They are specialised in a professional sector (e.g., OPPBTP<sup>7</sup> in construction), a risk (e.g., IRSN on nuclear risks), or generalists in OSH (INRS, Anact). The state leads the coordination of all these actors through the national occupational health plan and various agreements linking the structures by defining common actions.

The Labour Code requires the employer to organise or join an occupational health service in terms of OSH services available to the companies. Depending on the company's size, occupational health services can be dedicated to one company (for big enterprises: independent occupational health services) or common to different companies (for SMEs: inter-enterprise occupational health services). Occupational health services, whether in-house or externally contracted, are in charge of the medical surveillance of employees (with regular visits) and monitoring of working conditions (by studying workstations and conditions of exposure to risks). Occupational medicine is organised, materially and financially, by employers.

## 1.4 Challenges to systematic RA

Research shows that, overall, companies of different sizes in France do not have a systematic approach to prevention and RA, and a systematic approach is even more challenging for MSEs, which are the employers of half of the private sector workforce.<sup>8</sup> Few employers develop a DUER, according to DARES research.<sup>9</sup>

The main reasons that organisations that 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%).<sup>10</sup> The statutory obligation is the main motivator for enterprises to undertake an assessment of occupational risks. As illustrated below, French MSEs indicate the complexity of legal obligations and a lack of time or staff as the main difficulties in addressing OSH in companies. Importantly, paperwork was regarded as a barrier by one-third of the companies, as well as a lack of money.

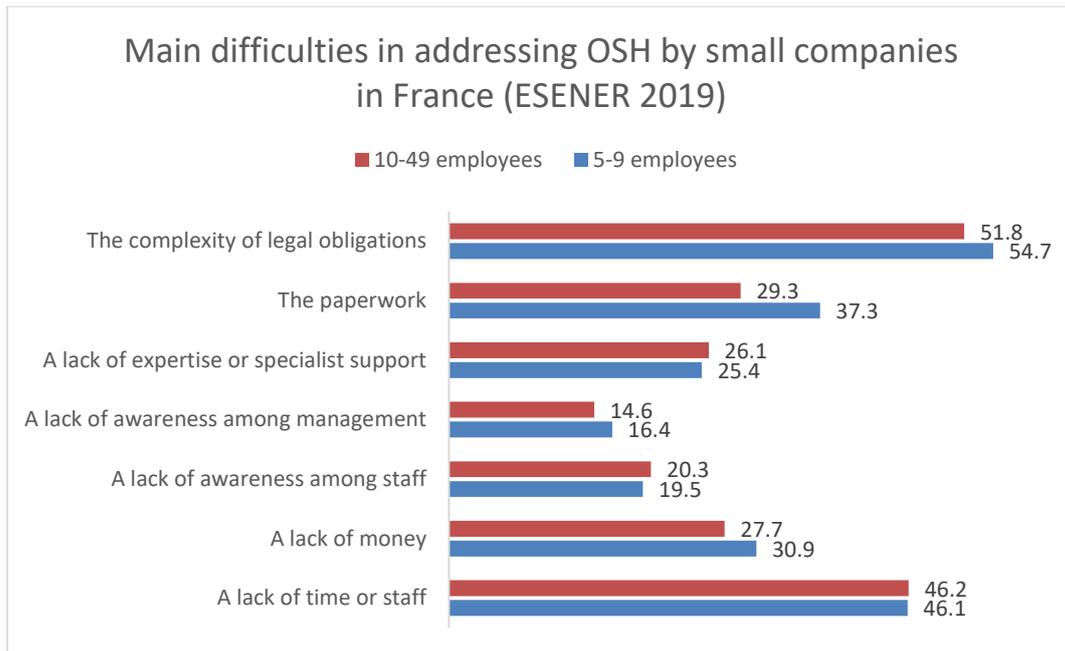
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<sup>7</sup> OPPBTP is the Organisme Professionnel de Prévention du Bâtiment et des Travaux Publics. The website is available at: <https://www.oppbtp.com/>

<sup>8</sup> INRS. (2017). *OiRA - An INRS/EU-OSHA partnership for risk assessment for MSEs*. Available at: <https://en.inrs.fr/our-activities/assistance/oira.html>

<sup>9</sup> DARES. (2016). *La prévention des risques professionnels: Les mesures mises en oeuvre par les employeurs publics et privés*. DARES Analyses, No 013. Available at: [http://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2016-013\\_v.pdf](http://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2016-013_v.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *ESENER 2019*. Available at: <https://visualisation.osha.europa.eu/esener/en/survey/overview/2019>

**Figure 1: Main difficulties in addressing OSH by small companies in France (ESENER 2019)**

Source: ESENER 2019

In small companies, often without the human resources dedicated to this work, the form that the RA takes and the way in which it is regarded and implemented is very different from one company to another. Involvement of employees also varies. A study on occupational RA practices among French SMEs found that within the same sector of activity (hotels, restaurants and car repair), some had not set up the DUER, due to lack of time or resources, while others had set up a participatory evaluation methodology with all employees.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.5 Methodology, challenges and adjustments to this study

This section describes the key methodological approaches, challenges and mitigation measures introduced during the course of the research for this study.

The study was implemented between September 2021 and October 2022, with the fieldwork phase (interviews) implemented in the period from October 2021 to July 2022.

### 1.5.1 Recruitment and sampling

A total of 40 qualitative interviews were conducted during this study, of which 37 were interviews with representatives of small companies, and three targeted professionals familiar with the topic of OSH and RAs in France, with a specific focus on the OiRA software (three interviews with ‘intermediaries’ — OSH professionals — and three scoping interviews with representatives of relevant organisations). The starting point for identifying and contacting companies for the research was a database of ESENER 2019 survey respondents, where representatives of enterprises previously contributing to the survey agreed to be contacted for follow-up data collection. In particular, the sectors where OiRA tools are available in France were selected and over 700 companies were contacted by email or phone. This approach did not produce positive results, which is why other sampling approaches were introduced. These included: promoting the study through INRS’ contacts; reaching out to the so-called gatekeepers

<sup>11</sup> Verdier, E., Kornig, C., Mossé, P., & Setbon, M. (2008). *Entre plan national et initiative locale, l'émergence d'une gouvernance territoriale des risques professionnels? : Rapport final*. [Rapport de recherche] Laboratoire d'Économie et de Sociologie du Travail (LEST). Available at: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00436521v1>

(understood as industry organisations, including chambers of commerce, trade unions, etc.); and reaching out to companies through publicly available contact repositories (such as Indexa, Annuaire des Entreprises de France, Pagespro). Lastly, to boost the recruitment efforts, a France-based recruitment agency was contracted to mobilise enterprises for the study. It needs to be noted that due to the ongoing adjustments of the recruitment strategies, a proportion of the respondents contributing to the study received small monetary incentives for their participation.

Recruitment targeted all sectors where OiRA tools have been available in France (more than 40 sectors). The final sample includes 27 respondents with experience using OiRA (24 companies and 3 intermediaries) and 13 companies representing other approaches to OSH RA. All the companies from both groups came from sectors where a French OiRA is available (to make it possible for the researchers to explore whether those not using OiRA had heard of the relevant OiRA tool in their sector and whether they would be interested in testing it).

The initial plan was to conduct two interviews at each company, one with a representative of management/owners and one with a representative of employees. The advantage of such an approach was to be able to compare the views and opinions of the two groups. It became clear, however, that while several managers mentioned some form of involvement of employees in the RA, these were normally not directly involved in the process and not involved in the use of the OiRA tool. In several cases, where the research team judged that participation of the employees as described would be a good basis for exploring their opinions, attempts were made to complement the interviews with managers with those of employees. There were, however, no positive responses and therefore the study sample consists of single interviews in individual companies.

#### **Sectors represented in the study**

**sample:** Manufacturing, Education, Telecommunications, Construction, Trade, Engineering, Accountancy, Veterinary services, Food service industry, Pharmaceutical industry, Personal care services, Optician sector, Non-food retail, E-commerce, Transport, Logistics, Auto mechanics, IT, Car dealership, Association, Recycling in the construction industry, Mining industry, Legal sector, Real estate and Tourism, Metallurgy, Medico-social (child protection), Waste management and recycling, Socio-cultural projects, Animal shelter.

### **1.5.2 Key data collection methods**

The study builds on three key data collection methods: in-depth scoping interviews with relevant stakeholders; in-depth structured interviews with representatives of companies; and desk research. Additionally, three in-depth interviews with professionals assisting companies in the implementation of OiRA were conducted.

The key method used was structured in-depth interviews with two interview guides, one for the OiRA users and another for non-OiRA users. Some sections in the guides overlapped. Additionally, OiRA interviews followed a specific tool-focused set of questions and were therefore slightly longer. All interviews except one were conducted in French (one was conducted in English as the respondent was not French). For reasons of practicality, geographical coverage as well as enabling easier recruitment, all the interviews were conducted remotely (via phone or online meetings, depending on the interviewee's preferences). Interviews lasted between 15 minutes and 1 hour, with 30 minutes being the average. While the interviews were conducted in French, the write-ups were completed in English to facilitate report writing.

### **1.5.3 Categories and analytical lenses**

It should be noted that the overall division between representatives of management and representatives of employees is not straightforward. This is true especially in smaller companies where an employee with any supervisory role could be in fact considered both as employee and manager. Additionally, no differences were observed in the judgements and opinions among the respondents based on their dichotomic categorisation as management/employee, which is why this categorisation was not considered further in the analysis. Similarly, while it is generally interesting to consider the gender lens

in any data collection and analysis, we have not observed any patterns in this small group of respondents that would prompt further gendered analysis.

Following the general study design, the interview data were disaggregated into three key groups, based on the dominant method used to support the RA: companies with experience in using OiRA (currently or in the past); companies using other online/interactive RA software; and companies opting for offline approaches (Excel spreadsheets/grids) sometimes being supported by external OSH services (public and private). While it would be interesting to further divide the companies into more precise groups, the small size of the overall sample made this unfeasible.

## 1.6 How to read this report

This report consists of two major parts that can be read as a whole but also make sense as stand-alone text. It starts with an overview section, where findings for the three respondent groups are presented: OiRA users, users of other RA online software, and companies using offline approaches. In this section we present the analysis of study results specifically to three groups of respondents: OiRA users; users of other online RA tools; and companies relying on traditional approaches (Excel spreadsheets and external RA service providers). By means of this grouping, the report aims to offer relevant findings and conclusions for each of the groups separately, investigating whether there are any patterns, synergies or overlaps among the companies opting for the same approach to RA.

For consistency, each section follows the same logic but, inevitably, the OiRA section is by far the most comprehensive. This is because understanding how OiRA is used and could be improved is the key focus of this study. In line with that, the OiRA section builds on the largest group of interviews (26 interviews focusing on company experiences and three scoping interviews).

The second part of the report — comparative findings — integrates information from the three sections presented earlier, looking for possible patterns and divergences across all the companies and approaches. In this section, the findings from the interviews and the desk research considering the study's key research questions are discussed. The section ends with two sets of recommendations: one with conclusions from the study on how to enhance the number of companies implementing OSH RAs in general, and one with specific conclusions regarding OiRA.

## 2 Overview of the sample from the perspective of the proposed typology

For this study we conducted a total of 40 interviews (please see Table 1). Within this group, 24 were with representatives of companies using (or having used OiRA<sup>12</sup>) and 13 were with representatives using other approaches. The latter can be further divided into companies using other interactive tools (six) and companies either using what we consider as a 'traditional approach' to RA (internal offline tools and/or support of external OSH companies or services). Further, the analysed sample includes three intermediary interviews, conducted with professionals supporting the implementation of OiRA across various companies.

**Table 1: Overview of the sample**

	OiRA	Other approaches
Companies using primarily one tool	23	13
Interview with a user who used OiRA in the past but now uses other software	1	1
Intermediaries	3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>

**Table 2: Overview of non-OiRA approaches**

	Other approaches	
	Online	Offline
Companies using primarily one tool	5	8
Interview with a user who used OiRA in the past but now uses other software	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

### 2.1 Companies using OiRA

The largest sample in the study consists of companies using OiRA as their primary RA tool. Among these, there were enterprises with varying levels of experience with the software, including those that have been using OiRA repeatedly over several years, through to relative newcomers (with one RA completed) and one company that had just started their first RA.

<sup>12</sup> One company used OiRA in the past and another interactive tool now and, as such, data from this interview are included in two sections.

The sample includes both very small companies and those exceeding 50 employees. Different sectors are represented (e.g., beauty and hair salons, opticians, pharmacies, veterinarian services), with several respondents from the construction industry.

In this section, we present how the companies approach RA using OiRA, their primary motivations to carry out systematic RAs and to use OiRA for this purpose specifically, and how they find information about OSH and RA tools. Lastly, we examine opinions about OiRA, looking at how the impact of OiRA is perceived, together with the tool's strengths and ideas for further improvement.

### 2.1.1 What are the motivations, sources of information and challenges to systematic RA?

#### ▪ What motivates companies to carry out systematic RA?

While the study revealed multiple motivations that prompt companies to carry out RAs, two clearly stand out among the OiRA users: the **need to comply with legal obligations regarding OSH** (ten companies cited completing the annual RA as a reason), and the desire to **ensure safety, health, and wellbeing of the employees (nine companies)**. Further, companies reported the need to reduce and avoid accidents at work (four companies), which is also highlighted from the perspective of ensuring productivity at the company, reducing levels of absence, and the financial savings due to avoiding accidents (which are costly to companies). The need to foster a culture of OSH compliance was also mentioned.

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*I hate it when the work is done badly and don't want customers or employees to complain. So, there is no way to not respect the law.*

*Manager, beauty salon*

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Two companies in the construction sector (a building and furniture engineering company and a construction company) referred to the fact that in order to gain **certifications** (ISO 18001, ISO 14001, and PAS certification), it was necessary to carry out an RA. Moreover, they highlighted that regularly conducted RAs provide a baseline and an overall picture of the company's strengths and weaknesses. They further mentioned the fact that RAs allow them to put into place action plans that are consistent and in line with existing risks.

An optician salon reported for instance a **practical need**. When some of the former employees took over the salon as owners, they decided to carry out a systematic RA. The company had not previously considered certain risks and some areas were not properly equipped/arranged. That is why the company needed a tool to improve these omissions.

In the case of one company, the element that triggered the implementation of a full RA was **a near miss**.

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*Of course, there is compliance with the regulation and being in a legal framework. But it is also to anticipate, prevent sick leave and the risk of accidents, which hinder productivity and the proper running of the company. We want to avoid a working style based on bad practices.*

**Manager, transport/logistics**

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A customer almost fell since there was a hole in the floor with a metallic piece sticking out. The customer told the company that this situation was dangerous and, at that moment, the interviewee realised that this problem had to be solved. 'We want to have the lowest [possible] accident rate. If there are too many accidents, we [need to] pay more for employee protection.' The respondent further explained that in addition, in case of accidents, the company bears a direct responsibility.

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*The main motivation to carry out RA is physical and mental health of employees. Wellbeing at work is very important for us.*

**Manager, education sector**

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Overall, there seem to be no major differences in terms of motivations among sectors or by company size. Very few companies quote only legal motivation for carrying out systematic RA. Most of the respondents acknowledged the legal aspect but also highlighted the broader need to ensure safe working environments both for their employees and their clients. Others saw RA as an important element of the company branding/image. As a respondent in the IT installation sector explained, 'In terms of image, I think it's important that my clients know that I am interested in the potential risks they may encounter. Also, the fact of being sure that when I go or send a colleague on a work site, there will be no accidents. If I had to prioritise, I would say that health and safety is the main motivation.'

A respondent in the car repair sector wanted to counteract the negative reputation that this sector is perceived as having: 'I want to be irreproachable when it comes to working conditions for my employees.' This interviewee had heard many negative opinions about mechanics and auto repair professions in general and wanted to be part of those who offer comfort and assistance to employees.

▪ **What are the challenges to systematic RA?**

The research did not reveal any major challenges to systematic RAs among the companies consulted. The majority, when asked, explicitly stated that they did not face any obstacles or challenges. However, one of the challenges cited relates to the fact that the OiRA tools enable the addition of customised risks.

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*The information we find is usually very general and it's hard to find personalised information for our activity. Plus, when we have a problem (e.g. we have a stair and we wanted to facilitate the access for people with reduced mobility), we weren't referred to a specific link that would allow us to solve the problem but rather to general solutions that didn't necessarily help us.*

**Manager, optician salon**

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This is also expected, since it is not always possible to make sure that a tool covers all possible risks in a company. Several interviewees stated that it is not easy to add customised risks. One respondent further clarified: 'We can add our own risks, but the problem is that sometimes we don't know how to phrase these risks. For me, the software is not automated enough because there are many things where we must guess what to put in the software. A powerful tool is a tool where you don't have to guess.'

Sometimes companies wanted to have more specific information about certain risks and possible solutions. Many of the consulted companies currently using OiRA reported that prior to OiRA they either did not have any systematic approaches in place or they relied on Excel spreadsheets, judged to be time-consuming and not efficient. This leads to the assumption that the lack of effective and user-friendly tools might also have been a challenge when it comes to implementing systematic RAs.

#### ▪ **Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on RAs**

Some interviewees noted that the pandemic prompted additional work in terms of RA as enterprises had to modify and add new risks and recommendations (masks, hydroalcoholic gel) into the OiRA tool. They also had to integrate new risks such as psychosocial risks related to the introduction of teleworking over a long period. Some companies used the dedicated OiRA tool for COVID-19 in addition to their primary OiRA tool, while others manually added COVID-19-related risks to their core tool. While creating additional work, this was however not a major challenge.

Beyond the need to consider new risks (possibly through carrying out additional RAs or updating the existing ones), the pandemic also made monitoring more difficult. It was observed by the office manager in the accountancy company that: 'We had to implement remote work on a large scale and many questions have arisen with this for example if an employee has already started working but is having a breakfast, what should be done in this situation? We gave recommendations to employees, but it was complex to monitor them.'

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*The COVID-19 crisis added new risks and brought to light risks that were underestimated so we had to add criteria and timeframes more important compared to what was initially planned.*

*Quality Safety and Environment inspector, construction sector*

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In the case of one company, some positive effects of COVID-19 crisis were observed. Mainly due to the pandemic, the involvement of employees in the RA process became more regular since the company worked more remotely and organised online meetings with employees. Indeed, similar thoughts were shared by the HR manager from a transportation and logistics company: 'Some drivers are not located close to the headquarters and before the pandemic we had to wait until they were on the site to get their feedback and conduct the RA. Now it is done by videoconference and the process is more regular. For instance, if there was a situation two days ago, the driver can forget if he waits a long time before transmitting the information to us, whereas with the video conferencing we can do things more quickly.'

#### ▪ **How do the companies find information about OSH in general and RA approaches?**

The companies reported different sources of information about OSH. The three key information channels are the Internet, subscriptions to relevant magazines and newsletters, and contacts with occupational medicine services. Sources covered general OSH and sector specific information.

The enterprises relying on information from the Internet, report public institution websites as the key sources of OSH information. This includes such websites as INRS,<sup>1</sup> Légifrance,<sup>13</sup> Améli<sup>14</sup> and OSTR – Objectif Santé Travail.<sup>15</sup>

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*The INRS website is the main source of information about OSH, the website is well done and very complete. There are other sources such as HR-related websites, but the main source remains the INRS website.*

**Manager, education sector**

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Some companies mentioned subscriptions to OSH press/media with frequent newsletters, for instance, Préventica.<sup>16</sup>

Other sources that were mentioned are the Labour Code and the HR manager/department within the company who is specialised in labour law and who can help in case of complicated situations, changes in legislation or compliance updates.

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*These documents and sheets are well done but sometimes information is missing, and we have to search on other websites.*

**Manager, construction sector**

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Several companies receive information about OSH from occupational medicine<sup>17</sup> that sends documents on different themes (e.g., how to work with screens for a long period, toxicological products). One receives all the information from the employment office (Pôle emploi)<sup>18</sup> because the interviewee has attended training courses there and has kept in touch with their referent to whom they pose all questions related to OSH in the workplace. According to this interviewee, however, the information available from the employment office is generalised and not personalised/adapted enough to the company's context.

Study results also point to **sector specific sources** used by companies. In the case of the construction sector, the OPPBTP dedicated to the prevention of occupational risks in the construction sector, is also listed as an important source of knowledge. Others list Fédération française du bâtiment (FFB)<sup>19</sup> and Fédération des Promoteurs Immobiliers (FPI),<sup>20</sup> mostly for technical information.

Overall, while there are many channels dealing with OSH, some companies highlight that none seems to exhaust the topic and gaining a full picture requires the consultation of different sources.

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<sup>13</sup> Légifrance is a government website gathering information about law, available at: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/>

<sup>14</sup> The Améli health insurance official website is available at: <https://www.ameli.fr/>

<sup>15</sup> The OSTR – Objectif Santé Travail website is available at: <https://www.objectifsantetravail.fr/>

<sup>16</sup> The Preventica website is available at: <https://www.preventica.com/>

<sup>17</sup> Médecine du Travail is an occupational medicine organisation. The official website is available at: <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F2211>

<sup>18</sup> The employment office website is available at: <https://www.pole-emploi.fr/international/mobilite-internationale/pole-emploi-an-asset-for-all-you.html>

<sup>19</sup> FFB is a French building federation. The website is available at: <https://www.ffbatiment.fr/>

<sup>20</sup> FPI is a federation of property developers of France. The website is available at: <http://fpifrance.fr/>

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*That information [about OSH] is useful but too general and diversified in the sense that you have to go on other sources to complete the information. I would like to have a better support in the search for information related to OSH. A tool that centralises all the information would be convenient.*

**Manager, telecommunications**

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**Companies report that better structured and comprehensive information sources about OSH are needed.** They are aware that availability of information does not equal their automatic trustworthiness as ‘many scams come from private companies.’ Usually, the information available is judged as useful, but it happens that ‘there are recommendations without concrete solutions.’

### **2.1.2 How was OiRA chosen?**

- **How did the company find out about OiRA?**

Companies in the sample became aware of OiRA through three key channels: the Internet, recommendations from OSH specialists, and word of mouth.

Several companies learnt about OiRA by word of mouth (recommendation of a colleague or a business partner). In one case, a colleague also gave a short presentation about OiRA, recommending it to the interviewee. In another, it was a recommendation from an employee of another hair salon. ‘He told me that his boss did an RA with OiRA and was really satisfied.’ Then, the interviewee informed himself about the tool on the Internet and told his own boss. In the case of another company, a new employee knew about OiRA from their previous workplace and introduced it to the company. In another, OiRA came as a recommendation from the company’s accountant.

Among those reporting that they found out about OiRA on the Internet, some attribute this to ‘coincidence’. Five companies were Googling about OSH or RA tools specifically (in French and English) and this is how they came across OiRA. One company researched several online tools on the Internet, compared them and finally chose OiRA. Another firm discovered the OiRA tool by coincidence while doing an Internet search on occupational risks. The company came across the INRS website where there was a link presenting the OiRA tool.

In another case, the HR department did some OSH research on the Internet and received advice from the company’s external partners, who referred it to the OiRA tool. ‘After using it, we realised that the tool is useful and pertinent, that is why we still use it. But we can say that we found it by coincidence.’

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*I started off searching for information and, as I came across the website, I instantaneously got drawn to it. I started looking at the process, and I went further and further into it. It was very intuitive, relevant and engaging ... So it seemed logical just to continue filling it in, even though I initially didn’t envisage completing it that day.*

**Co-owner, restaurant**

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Public authorities are an important source through which respondents learnt about OiRA. These include the INRS website and newsletter (three), as well as Améli or Ursaff.<sup>21</sup> In one case, OiRA was recommended by the occupational health assistant (OHA; *assistante santé au travail*) of the occupational health service; in another it came recommended by OSTR – Objectif Santé Travail. For one company, discovery of OiRA was part of its general effort to digitalise processes and included exploring FranceConnect<sup>22</sup>. In some cases, companies learnt about OiRA from occupational medicine experts who provided them with support.

The sample included a company in the veterinary sector that was invited to help develop OiRA by the trade union and this is how they learnt about the tool. The same company reported that they still felt that they do not have enough information to make an informed decision about the right RA tool, as they only received information from trade unions. In general, they described their awareness of RA tools as low, and they came across OiRA only because the managing director was contacted to participate in its development.

#### ▪ Who decided to test OiRA and what was the motivation?

OiRA was selected in most cases by the managers, or the employees tasked with carrying out RAs. In one case only were the employees consulted regarding selection of the tool. Largely, the decision was made by the managers alone, or when it was proposed by employees, the decision was validated by the management.

At first, one interviewee expected OiRA to resemble an institutional and complex website such as a tax website. ‘Institutional/governmental sites are a pain and heavy (i.e., complicated and in French: *lourds*).’ However, he was pleasantly surprised because the tool was smooth, simple, and easy to use, and it was easy to create an account. ‘OiRA is easy to use with clear tabs and menus.’ According to this interviewee, compared to the previous method, that is, Excel files, OiRA makes the RA more formal and allows for more regular and structured monitoring.

In several cases (five), the employees who found OiRA, since they were looking for tools to carry out RA, made the decision on their own. For instance, one respondent thought OiRA was a good tool and an easy one for him to use, so he chose it. The decision was not made collectively, and other employees were not consulted. He was motivated by the fact that the tool is rigorous in terms of information, and this was thought to be helpful in reducing accidents, which are expensive, and offering more protection of employees.

In most cases, the decision was made by the management/person in charge and other employees were not consulted. In fact, the representative of one company explicitly stressed that there is no need to consult employees in the selection process, not seeing any added value in this.

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*The most important thing for employees is to see that there are actions being taken in terms of OSH, not how I chose the tool.*

**Accountant, accountancy sector**

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When respondents referred to a ‘collective decision’ to select the tool, they largely meant consultations between managers or between managers and the owner of the company. For instance, in one case, it was a collective decision made by managers of different units at the company. They were attracted to

<sup>21</sup> Ursaff is a union for the collection of social security and family allowance contributions. The official website is available at: <https://www.urssaf.fr/portail/home.html>

<sup>22</sup> FranceConnect is a government online identification and authentication service. The official website is available at: <https://franceconnect.gouv.fr/>

the fact that the tool was tailored to their needs, saved them research, and offered structure and a 'roadmap'.

Only two companies, also reporting high involvement of employees in RA, reported that they made a collective decision to select OiRA, one involving consultations with employees. In the first case, the interviewee made the final decision to use the tool, although the decision process included a meeting involving employees and management to discuss the software, and everyone agreed to use OiRA. In the second company, it was a proposal based on an analysis that the respondent had made with a colleague, followed by management validating this proposition. As for the employees, they were consulted through the Instances représentatives du personnel (IRP), which ensures the collective opinion of the workers within a company. The company was attracted by OiRA because of its level of adaptability, reflecting circumstances specific to sectors covered.

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*This was a collective decision in consultation with the employees. Knowing that everyone has a specific task for which they are responsible, everyone feels involved.*

**Manager, optician**

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#### ▪ Why has OiRA been chosen?

When asked to reflect on what initially attracted the respondents to OiRA and motivated them to test the tool, they cited different reasons. Many are related to the tool's legitimacy and endorsement by the public authorities, which makes OiRA trustworthy in the eyes of the respondents. Other reasons relate to the set-up of OiRA, the fact that it is available for different sectors and is easy to use.

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*The INRS has the stamp of the French government which shows a certain seriousness and credibility. The fact of having the support of the government adds confidence to the tool.*

**Manager, IT sector**

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Companies were encouraged by the legitimacy and trustworthiness that is associated with INRS, and by the fact that OiRA came recommended by OSH specialists (such as the OHA). In the latter case, for instance, the employee was also presented with an option to use an Excel spreadsheet. The OHA recommended OiRA as a simpler and more user-friendly option and this was selected. Choosing OiRA over another option that was explored was also the case in another company. Prior to OiRA, this construction DUER company was also interested in another online RA software called 'Logiciel Document Unique DUER', but in the end the company opted for the OiRA tool.

One company mentioned several factors that convinced them to choose OiRA. The first was the 'INRS guarantee', which is seen as a serious and quality organisation, and another was the ease of usage of the tool as well as the fact that OiRA seemed sufficient for the company's needs.

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*I was looking for something quite specific to help me abide by the requirements and regulations in France. I also wanted to find something that is recent and in line with recent COVID-19-related requirements. Previously I have done RA for many companies and I've either been guided by an agency or used existing documentation that was partly filled in. On this particular occasion, I wanted to start from scratch.*

**Co-owner, restaurant**

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Other respondents chose to use OiRA because it allows them to add their own risks in addition to those already included in the tool. This is very important as it creates room to adjust the tool to company circumstances. Others were attracted by 'its simplicity, facility of use and the report at the end which is really practical and motivates us to put in place required measures.'

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*The great thing is also that you can save it and come back to it so that if you get interrupted your work isn't wasted.*

**President, veterinary sector**

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For one employee, the fact that she was able to speak over the phone to somebody from the INRS OiRA team made a huge difference. As she recalls, the service won her over right away. The human contact that she had made the difference.

In another company, what triggered the use of OiRA was an accident in which an employee fell because the floor was slippery. Moreover, the interviewee found out that the cleaning process of the salon was not optimal. He did not want to go back to the paper and pencil method (*papier-crayon*) because it became tedious after a while and it had not prevented the accident, so he decided to try a digital solution instead.

Prior to OiRA, another company had a member of the HR team who was in charge of risk management and prevention. This person provided good practices, worksheets and raised awareness on OSH topics among the staff. When this person left, the enterprise was left without a structured process for RA, so they decided to turn to OiRA, looking for a blueprint.

Prior to OiRA, another company used an internal Excel file where all the information related to OSH was listed. 'It was not very efficient, there were many sick leaves.' During the COVID-19 crisis, they wanted to accelerate the process and make the employees more secure by switching to a more efficient tool. In another enterprise, the respondent used a PDF with good OSH practices. 'With a PDF document it's passive because it's only reading whereas with an online tool there is interaction, we can export documents, or have a follow-up. I think an online tool is more suitable for a company owner who has employees to manage.'

### ▪ What has OiRA replaced?

Prior to embarking on OiRA, companies either used Excel spreadsheets or had no systematic RA at all. For all except one respondent, OiRA has been the first online tool that they have used. The only online tool that was used prior to OiRA was Préventica, implemented in a car repair shop.

Several companies used Excel sheets, which they had developed based on their own research on different websites or the Labour Code. According to the interviewees, this approach was generally time-consuming and not very reliable. These factors prompted the need to look for dedicated software.

Before using OiRA, one interviewee was in charge of collecting the information necessary to carry out an internal audit in the company regarding OSH. As she observed, 'When I used the Excel file, I had to modify everything manually so there was a risk of losing information. When there are many changes to be made on a file it can become tedious when you have different versions of the file. Overall, inserting written information in Excel is not practical.' This 'do-it-yourself' (*bricolage*) method was tiring, and the company decided to switch to an automated software.

Similar observations came from another company where prior to OiRA an Excel sheet was the key instrument for carrying out RAs. The Excel tool was deemed to be good at the start but quickly became tiring because the company had to constantly update the risks and modify the sheet manually. For others, while they had good experiences with Excel sheets, they still saw the clear advantages of OiRA, especially that it reflects the reality of the company and the different types of work carried out.

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*Excel sheets weren't bad but dematerialised digital tools are better because they avoid mistakes. When we were working on Excel sheets, we had to add risks and measures on our own and do the whole research work, so it was easy to forget about something. Besides, some Excel sheets do not apply to our sector whereas OIRA is adapted to our activity.'*

*Manager, e-commerce*

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Several companies (five) mentioned not having had in place any systematic RA approach prior to OiRA. One respondent reported that she did not have enough time to analyse the issue of OSH in her company, so OiRA created the opportunity to conduct RA in a structured way. Others had some sort of RA but in a limited form. For instance, one company in the veterinary sector previously used a paper-based form with checkboxes. It received the form from the trade union, together with some guidance. However, this form only permitted them to identify the risks, without measures to address them.

### 2.1.3 How is OiRA used?

Companies report various approaches to using OiRA, differing from the frequency of carrying out RAs (between weekly and annually), levels of modification of the tool (some fill out OiRA as it is while others propose significant modifications), and the overall set-up of RAs.

- **Who carries out RA and how is this organised?**

OiRA is often conducted by owners/managing directors and other people holding managerial positions. One co-owner and the manager of the company argued that it is advantageous for executives themselves to carry out RAs, to have a proper understanding of occupational risks in their enterprise and identify potential hazards and areas of improvement.

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*I think it is vital to do it internally. If I get someone else to do it, there is too much of a temptation to see it as a document that you put on the shelf and forget. You have to do it, you have to understand it and question yourself with each risk. The RA needs to be based on your particular situation, it's very unique to each business.*

**Co-owner and Manager, restaurant sector**

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Other people responsible for OiRA RAs are HR/office managers and other administrative staff.

The process of completing OiRA is usually divided into two stages: data collection/risk identification and uploading the information into the software. This study did not identify any specific order of delivering these stages: some companies collect information beforehand, synthesise it and put it into OiRA; others prefer to start the RA process and gather necessary information as they go. To a large extent, users rely on the information that comes with OiRA and complement it with information received from employees, colleagues, or other information, mainly online or from.

Most users completed OiRA on their own. In one case, the interviewed company completed OiRA with the assistance of an external consultant, while others consulted on their questions with sectoral organisations, OHAs, or simply a colleague from the sector or company with a broader knowledge of OSH or OiRA itself.

The study findings show that OiRA is a tool that is used multiple times, and users stick to using OiRA throughout the year.

- **How much time do users need to complete OiRA?**

The time to complete OiRA varies significantly, and so do expectations about the anticipated time needed to complete OiRA. For example, one company claimed to need more than 1 hour to complete the questionnaire, which was more time than the user expected. On the other hand, another company completed the OiRA over three months and was positively surprised by the speed of the process.

Notably, many users distinguished the process of collecting information for OiRA and inserting collected data into the software. The time needed to only interact with the software varies across the respondents from 15 minutes to two to three days. On the other hand, the time for data collection differs across the company's approaches towards data collection. These approaches include identifying risks, employee consultation and gathering information from representatives of departments within the enterprise.

Other identified approaches to data collection are more elaborate and, thus, more time-consuming. For example, one company has two team leaders who survey the field and report the risks and other valuable information. Additionally, they research obligations for the sector and different positions within the company.

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*It really depends because sometimes we have to revisit the same session multiple times or rediscuss certain matters with employees. When it comes to RA, we try to be efficient and have something meticulous.*

**Manager, road transport/construction company**

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Then, team leaders prepare a list of existing occupational risks, past accidents, and approaches to mitigate them. This material is then used to fill out OiRA. In the case of another company, the entire process lasted around three months, as the company previously did not have any systematic approach to RA. Its strategy included filling out the questionnaire by all employees, aggregating responses and discussing results during a general staff meeting.

The time needed to complete OiRA was increased in companies that encountered some technical difficulties while working with the tool. Three out of 22 companies reported technical issues, such as slowness, data loss, backup errors, error messages and system bugs. In the case of one company, it happened several times, and the respondent needed to start over again and revalidate the RA. The company did not contact INRS but solved the problem on its own. It was not clear from the interviewee whether the technical issues were related to an Internet connection, software bugs or other issues.

#### ▪ How do users complete OiRA?

Almost half of respondents claimed to use the OiRA in chronological order. Following the order of the tool was motivated by the desire to follow the instructions, checking all available RA sections for the chosen sector, or a result of questions that corresponded well with the company's activities. The chronological order was also followed in the case of a company that filled in OiRA with the support of an external consultant.

Other respondents decided to skip modules. That was the case of users who found OiRA sections and subsections too general or not well adjusted to the company activity. For example, one company skipped a module on transport, as its employees took public transportation to get to work. Notably, one of the respondents, a representative of an IT company installing IT equipment, who worked with multiple clients and on numerous job sites, appreciated the possibility of skipping sections.

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*If during an intervention we have to install cables at height, I select the fall prevention section (in the OiRA tool). On the contrary, on some sites where there is no electricity yet, the whole electricity section in OiRA is ignored.*

**Manager, IT sector**

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Most of the companies completed OiRA in several sessions, thus allowing them to collect any missing information or revisit the questionnaire several times to understand the questions better and ensure precise responses. The minority of study respondents completed OiRA in one session, which was primarily the case for the companies that first collected all necessary information beforehand and

inserted gathered information in one sitting afterwards or only with short breaks to double-check some information.

- **How often do companies use OiRA?**

**Interview findings confirm that OiRA is a live tool, with 16 respondents who had completed OiRA more than once.** Most interviewed users claimed to use OiRA at least once a year to conduct the general review or have used it once so far but plan to use it annually. Frequent OiRA use could be observed based on examples such as a manufacturing company, which has conducted at least 10 RAs over 3.5 years, and a car sales and repair company, which conducted 15 RAs over two years. Many of the respondents appreciated the continuous online availability of OiRA, which enabled the reuse of existing RAs in the case of newly emerging risks, new equipment, or occupational accidents.

Most respondents updated the existing RA version within their OiRA account. The possibility of updating existing RAs was especially appreciated by companies needing frequent RA updates but also in the case of companies with a stable working environment, as it allows efficient updates only on newly emerging risks.

Few companies start a new RA from scratch every time; however, respondents did not cite any specific motivations other than personal preference. Two companies used the possibility of 'cloning' existing RAs to then integrate information for the new RA in the cloned version. This way they could keep track of and save old versions of the RA in order to have an overview of improvements, evolution, or regression and to have a written record of the work carried out in terms of OSH. Almost all respondents claimed to make online updates, with one company having two stages offline, allowing it to discuss the RA with employees and take notes, and then conducting an online update, integrating changes to the software.

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*The proposed measures are concrete but not sufficient because there are many things (i.e. risks) that we see on-site that the software doesn't see. We have to add those risks manually.*

**Manager, e-commerce**

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Regarding the frequency of updates, two interviewed companies used OiRA very frequently, and one company even weekly. That is the case with a building and furniture company that used the OiRA to maintain its ISO 14001 certification. To ensure compliance, the company organised a weekly risk analysis at three levels: the management, the project manager, and the employee responsible for the RA in the company.<sup>23</sup> All the changes to the RA are inserted into OiRA, and all the changes are available to employees via weekly updates/bulletins. For example, during the week the interview took place, the company added post-pandemic measures on employees' return to offices after the end of certain COVID-19 measures.

Another case is an IT company, which carried out equipment installation for various clients at different job sites. Not only did the company carry out RAs for each of its 50 clients/work sites separately, but it also updated the specific RA for one work site/client numerous times. The process also included an Excel table (external to OiRA), which the company owner used for notetaking during risk identification. First, the company owner filled in OiRA during the discussion with the client in order to learn about the working environment. Later, the company owner updated OiRA after signing the contract. After an in-person visit to the intervention site, a final update was conducted to ensure a physical inspection of occupational risks.

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<sup>23</sup> Referent from the Instances représentative du personnel (IRP).

Twenty-one companies plan to use OiRA again. One hair and beauty salon (a micro enterprise) claimed to be unsure about using OiRA in the future as it claimed to have no legal obligation to conduct RA as a small establishment. Another establishment said that it would probably use OiRA again but was open to considering other solutions. A third company had used OiRA in the past; however, the company had now switched to Tool B (see section 2.2.). This decision was motivated by the fact that this tool has more functionalities as it integrates multiple risk categories such as HR, training and ethics management and it is not limited to occupational risk management alone.

- **How is OiRA modified?**

Over half of the respondents claimed to make modifications by adding new risks. These included adding risks specific to particular positions, not sectors (risks for office workers in a transportation company) and introducing risks such as the number of accidents that occurred. One company added a specific risk after a dangerous situation with a metallic piece sticking out of a floor. The company decided to add a risk dedicated to the floor after one customer almost fell.

Among those who report having used the possibility for customised risks, several were adding aspects related to the COVID-19 pandemic (see also subsection 2.1.1).

- **Working with the action plan**

Most respondents reported downloading and printing available OiRA documentation (the general report and the action plan). The online version allowed respondents to make edits in the software and to share the downloaded report/action plan with the employees afterwards. Other reasons for downloading and printing cited by the interviewees are: using reports during awareness training sessions, storing reports for internal reviews, and presentations or printing reports and sending them to employees not working on the premises such as drivers and so on. There are also ways to cooperate with clients using the OiRA reports: the above-mentioned IT installation company additionally sent an OiRA report to its clients regarding the respective work site. In the case of dangerous intervention sites, the employee and site safety manager sign the OiRA report to ensure that the two parties are aware of the risks. Importantly, several companies report they will use the reported documents during possible labour inspection visits as a proof of completed RA.

Some companies choose to go beyond the options offered in OiRA, as the action plan is 'pertinent, but we fine-tune it according to our needs and activity. It is a good basis for work and reflection but afterwards we need to tailor it.' To adapt the action plan, the company 'goes outside the framework of the OiRA tool and seeks additional information and establishes a report by itself.' In this case, the OiRA action plan is a canvas that is used for a more extensive document developed by the company.

- **How are employees involved in RA?**

Companies using OiRA reported different levels of involvement of employees in RA, encompassing direct and active involvement in RA (albeit not working with the tool), through to being consulted about the risks in informal ways and being asked for feedback about completed OiRA reports.

One respondent pointed out that OiRA has enabled employees to be more involved in the RA process. With OiRA, they said that they could actually see the measures that are put in place and have access to all the documents. When the company used the Excel file, this was only available to the HR department.

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*I think the tool has seduced people who use it and employees who see the implementation of an effective and credible action plan.*

***Manager, logistics and transport***

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Respondents largely appreciated the value of involving employees, seeing this as a way of increasing compliance, transparency, and ownership of measures. However, some acknowledged the difficulties and sometimes low awareness of OSH among employees. OiRA brochures were mentioned as a useful tool for engaging employees.

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*It took three months to complete the RA. That's a long time, but you need people to get involved, this included going back to the shopfloor. The software is quick but you need people not only to participate, but also to respect the rules. OiRA works well as a psychological tool more than anything else. It favours compliance on the part of employees. ... We printed completed OiRA. This is very important for the employees to be aware and respect it.*

**Accountant, construction sector**

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The most prominent example of employee involvement comes from the optician sector, where **each employee is assigned to a specific task** to avoid a situation in which one person is in charge of the whole RA. Depending on the task assigned, employees identify risks and communicate them in meetings. There is a similar procedure in place for implementation of the action plan, with each employee in charge of a given measure so no one person manages everything. Before completing the RA with the OiRA tool, the company organised meetings and consultations with its employees to take into account their impressions and feedback. Employees were not really engaged with the software itself; they identified risks and were consulted but they did not input anything directly into the tool. However, overall, the feedback was that employees were satisfied with RA procedures within the company. Further, the OiRA reports were available to everyone in the company to allow everyone to see progress, the tasks to be done and the results.

In a construction company, OiRA was chosen and implemented by an accountant (internal staff). The company was well aware of how costly accidents are to the company and employees were consulted actively also to ensure compliance. The respondent (accountant) carried out the RA with OiRA online, although it was first internally discussed with several employees (consulted orally, based on printed pages with risks) linked to trade unions. In the next step, it was validated by the enterprise committee. One of the key benefits of this approach, according to the company, was that this enhanced employee compliance with the rules and safety principles. 'It makes it clear to employees that there are certain rules to respect, and the company will take consequent action if employees keep failing to respect safe processes, which have been agreed on.'

In another company in the construction sector (building and furniture engineering company), employees did not interact with the tool either but there were weekly updates about the RA conducted with OiRA, which were made available to employees via the company magazine. This meant that employees were aware of any changes related to OSH in the workplace. 'It is a tool that aims to protect them [the employees], so we must be able to communicate to them necessary information.' Further, when employees arrive on a site, they must check whether the risks listed in the OiRA tool correspond to the actual situation on the ground.

In one e-commerce sector company, employees participated in the RA process by identifying and reporting risks to their managers. Employees could also consult reports about health and safety in the company. In another company, the management representatives met with all employees to understand any new risks. Employees were consulted orally and through questionnaires.

A company operating in logistics observed that the involvement of employees was gradual. During the first six months of using OiRA, employees were not involved because the tool was new, and it took time for the company to fully familiarise itself with it. It was from then onwards that the employees started to be involved. With employees who are on site and work close to the headquarters of the company, the process is easier because employees are available for physical meetings. For the drivers who are not located close to the headquarters, the company holds online meetings with them to discuss OSH-related topics. The administrative staff are involved via collective meetings.

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*We try to involve employees as much as possible since the goal is to identify risks at work and there is nothing better for this than the employees who are in the field. Each employee may have experienced different risks and situations. For example, drivers have different problems depending on the geographical area to which they are assigned.*

**Manager, logistics**

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One assistant tasked with implementing OiRA reported that once she learnt how to use the tool, she organised a meeting with all the employees, asking them to identify the risks they were facing. She also asked them if they had any solutions. Further, online materials (brochures) are shared with employees.

**In some cases, employees are consulted about the finalised OiRA reports.** In one company, the management and the prevention consultant submitted the RA to employees for their feedback. If employees had comments or remarks, these were taken into account and modifications were made accordingly.

Another respondent carried out RAs on her own but planned to discuss the report and action plan with her other employees and think about what else they can improve to mitigate risks in the workplace.

Others reported informing only selected employees on a need-to-know basis. In a beauty salon, the employees did not engage with the tool and were not involved in the RA process. However, some elements of the RA were communicated to selected employees in a meeting.

In other companies, the involvement of employees was rather **limited, less structured, and largely informal**. In one company, the respondent placed the responsibility to speak up directly onto the employees: 'If a person in charge of transporting deliveries starts to have a back pain, she should mention it.' In this specific company, some of the employees were interviewed/consulted by those carrying out the RA so that the company could have better insight into OSH-related issues.

In the case of another company, the employee tasked with implementing the RA consulted other employees about risks over a lunch, without showing them the tool or report/action plan specifically.

Two companies neither involved nor informed employees at all. This was the case in a car repair shop, where the interviewee stated that employees were not aware that the company uses the OiRA tool. The manager commented: 'Most of the employees are not comfortable with and don't know much about online RA tools such as OiRA. They receive simple instructions about the rules they must respect in the workplace, but other than that, nothing more.'

Some respondents acknowledged that involving employees to a greater extent in RA is complicated. The managing director of a veterinary enterprise tried to raise awareness among his employees about OSH risks and prevention, but he admitted that employees are not sufficiently involved in the RA process. He did not manage to involve his employees in the process because of the small resources available in the company. He believed that involving the employees in RA would contribute to better prevention as

the prevention measures would be based on a collegial consensus. According to him, the main challenge to involving employees is the low level of awareness of OSH among employees.

- **Is OiRA useful during inspection visits?**

Most companies reported they would use OiRA during labour inspection visits as proof of a completed RA. In the case of two companies, such inspections have already taken place, one conducted by the labour inspectorate and the other by a health insurance association (Assurance Maladie). In both cases,

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*We would use OiRA during labour inspection. It is one of the key reasons to use OiRA, to show that the company is doing its best to meet its obligations. The fact is that employees say they will, for instance, wear a seatbelt or protective equipment and then do not do it. But it is good to have this proof, albeit on paper (rather than in practice), for the labour inspectorate.*

**Accountant, construction sector**

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the OIRA report was accepted by the institutions. Six companies also mentioned that they would appreciate an additional certificate, other than the OiRA report or action plan. The idea behind the certificate would be to have a separate document confirming that the RA was conducted, for example, with the OiRA logo or other official stamps.

However, there are some doubts about the usefulness of documentation. A manager from a beauty salon observed that, on the one hand, OIRA is reliable and recognised as coming from an official institution, that is, INRS. But, on the other hand, the interviewee was not sure whether having an RA document is enough since 'It remains a declaration and I am not sure if it is really going to have an impact on companies' behaviour in terms of health and safety at work.'

#### **2.1.4 How is OiRA assessed?**

Several specific key strengths and positive aspects of OiRA surfaced across the interviews with an observable level of consistency. The key assets of OiRA include simplicity and its intuitive nature, the usefulness of the action plan and the fact that it gives RA a good structure. No interviewee had a negative opinion about OiRA. Most of the respondents, however, cannot compare OiRA to other software or online tools as they have largely either not used any approaches in the past or relied on Excel spreadsheets or paper-based tools.

- **Intuitive software**

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*The tool is very useful and went even beyond the company's needs because we didn't think to have a follow-up report/action plan at the end of the RA when we started. It went beyond our expectations.*

**Manager, optician sector**

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Overall, OiRA is judged as a very useful and efficient tool, offering many strengths and clear added value. As pointed out by one respondent, 'the software is intuitive, and the items are clear, precise and linear.' One employee appreciated the fact that with OIRA it is easy to create an account and said 'we are asked for little information and data to create the latter, so we don't feel judged.'

As one respondent observed, she learnt how to use it over the course of one morning, and others took only two hours. Another commented that there was **no problem with understanding the features** of the tool and it is **easy to navigate** through the software. Besides the fact that the tool is considered to be simple, the **availability of a tutorial** on the INRS website is appreciated. 'It's very practical and clear, the main perk is that it increases efficiency and saves time.' Another respondent appreciated that OiRA is **well structured, clear, and there is not too much data** to keep track of, which means that the user is not bombarded with information. She noted that the data presented is precise and that it allowed her to quickly understand things.

The tools are assessed as easy to learn and easy to implement. None of the companies reported significant problems in using OiRA. However, minor technical issues were mentioned by a few. One noted some issues accessing the tool online, but also stated that this might have been due to the quality of their Internet connection. One reported difficulties in getting started with the tool. At the beginning, this interviewee encountered some issues with the OiRA software. The interviewee felt that the tool was not very well explained and little information was provided when starting the process. 'I didn't manage to use OiRA at the first attempt, I needed two to three uses to fully understand the specificities of the tool, the modules ...' Finally, the interviewee worked out how to use the tool on his own without any external help. Nevertheless, he maintained that the tool was relatively easily and quickly comprehensible compared to other software.

Companies made numerous valuable comments on how OiRA could be further improved but only one ceased to use it (in favour of another, more comprehensive software), while two planned not to use it any more in the future (see subsection in section 2.1.3 How is OiRA used?). Nevertheless, even the companies that opted to shift away from OiRA highly recommended the tool for companies at the early stages of RA processes.

- **OiRA offers simple and helpful layout**

Layout is judged differently by respondents (see section 2.1.5). The general opinion was that it is clear and functional. One interviewee described it as sober and simple and noted that this is appreciated. Another observed that layout is 'extremely user-friendly and easy to navigate.' There was a sense that it resonates with the needs of different people: 'The layout has two sides, i.e., an institutional, official side which is chronological and another side which is more flexible where we can add our ideas and personalise the RA. People don't necessarily have the same level of IT comprehension or the same background in terms of diplomas and I think that the software is suitable for everyone.'

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*There is the main thread, and we see all the sections.  
There are possibilities to add remarks ... so it's dynamic.  
You learn by using the tool so it's easy to understand it.*

*Manager, transport sector*

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While one respondent described OiRA as 'ugly and institutional', he in fact saw this as an advantage. Since it is a professional site, the interviewee did not expect it to be visually pleasing. What is more, he noted that having a good-looking application could even be counterproductive: 'You have to find the right balance between a nice interface and a practical and efficient tool. An interface that is too attractive would even be counterproductive because it could give the impression of being a marketing tool rather than a risk prevention tool.' Another mirrored this sentiment, saying: 'It's a professional document that doesn't necessarily require makeup. The current interface is enough for me, I don't need something colourful with drawings everywhere. Something clear and well-structured is good for me.'

- **OiRA encourages better approaches to OSH, risk management and employee involvement**

OiRA is appreciated as a tool that helps to raise awareness and **strengthen a systematic approach** to risk management, especially among the companies that did not have in place any RA approach before using OiRA. Companies reported that conducting an RA with OiRA allowed them to understand risks that they had not thought of before. One interviewee mentioned that OiRA also helped to ‘acquire a lot of knowledge on OSH without much effort.’

Another respondent observed that OiRA **helped to improve the awareness** of risk prevention of the person who fills it out. For another company, which made the report and action plan available to the employees, OiRA helped them to be more transparent. Being **easy to use encourages revisiting of the tool** as opposed to using it only once.

It was also highlighted that since OiRA can be implemented internally, without the help of external services, this **encourages better ownership of RA**. The fact that there are deadlines to be respected within this action plan encourages action.

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

**President, veterinary sector**

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In companies where employees are part of the process (see also subsection in 2.1.3), OiRA is seen as contributing to **internal cohesion and teamwork**. One respondent appreciated the fact that OiRA is a communication tool, which allows company members to be fully informed about what is being done in terms of health and safety in the workplace. Others also highlighted the value of structuring the OSH dialogue in the company and fostering accountability with the help of RAs conducted in OiRA.

One respondent compared OiRA to the Excel file used before in the company, which, according to him was not updated regularly, did not provide for any way to involve employees and was internal to the administrative department. Using the Excel table, the company felt that the RA was less exhaustive, less precise, and less optimal than with OiRA. ‘OiRA is available to everyone, it’s a living thing, it provides us with information and indications that we have not thought of.’

One interviewee mentioned that before OiRA, employees were not involved, trained, or made aware of the risks. ‘But with OIRA, we do things together.’ OiRA has further helped to raise awareness among employees. ‘Now, they talk and help each other when it comes to OSH issues.’

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*I think it is vital to do it internally. If we get someone else to do it, there is too much of a temptation to see it as a document that you put on the shelf and forget. You have to do it, you have to understand it and question yourself with each risk. The RA needs to be based on your particular situation, it’s very unique to each business.*

**Co-owner, restaurant**

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- **OiRA is adaptable to the company's situation**

While this aspect received mixed responses (see section 2.1.5), several companies appreciated the fact that OiRA is well tailored to their needs and line of work. They found the tool to be 'perfect' and something that reflected their circumstances. Nevertheless, the companies that did not find all the sections relevant appreciated that 'it is not mandatory to fill in all the sections and it does not block us in the creation of the RA.' They felt that the questions are very coherent, clear, and precise. 'The questions are well adapted if we correctly select the occupations and the environment in which we work, but if we stay on something generic, the questions will be as generic.'

OiRA is also considered a very **practical tool**, as explained by one respondent, 'with this kind of tool, we could have the apprehension that it is theoretical and generalist but in practice it is well tuned to our activity. Also, we can add a lot of measures, personal comments and have the possibility to scroll through the propositions (within the menu).'

- **OiRA offers an action plan**

The availability of an action plan was widely appreciated throughout the target group. 'What is good about OIRA is that it allows creating an action plan, this report **helps prevent future accidents.**' The action plan was judged as **corresponding well to the identified risks**. It was welcomed that it was **very precise, going beyond respondents' expectations**. Companies also appreciated the **motivating value** of the action plan. One respondent stated that the **action plan accurately reflects** what the company experiences on a daily basis, so it is very helpful.

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*Seeing the action plan displayed, visualising it and seeing the progress is much more motivating for the whole team. ... it is very good, but it could be a little more personalised to our profession.*

*Manager, optician sector*

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The fact that the action plan can be further tailored is an asset. Some companies chose to go beyond it, as the action plan is 'pertinent, but we fine-tune it according to our needs and activity. It is a **good basis for work and reflection but afterwards we need to tailor it.**' One interviewee said that to adapt the action plan, the company 'goes outside the framework of the OiRA tool and seeks additional information and establishes a report by itself.' Another one explained that they keep adding things [to the action plan] as we go ...' Generally, companies find the **action plan very effective**. 'It proposes a plan for us to follow and helps us save time.' It is considered a **good reminder, ensuring the work on OSH is ongoing**. '[The action plan] was a really good reminder and it made me think. It's a great process to reinforce some things.'

- **OiRA provides structure**

Users appreciate OiRA's structure, which is **conducive to a well-rounded RA process**. Respondents observed that thanks to OiRA, the RA within the company is more structured and organised because the **work is already prepared**, and the company just has to answer the questions properly. It was noticed that OiRA allows for 'more **practicality, more organisation and more automation** regarding

the reporting.' Using the tool saves time and is efficient. OiRA can also be a complementary tool that is used with other written documents/sources.

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*We think that the tool is really detailed and complete. The advantage with OiRA is that it is structured, information is classified, there is a base on which we can rely, and we are not obliged to look for information by ourselves.*

**Manager, education sector**

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In general, the software **clarifies the RA and sets a framework** for the OSH approach within the company. 'The software allows us to meet the regulatory requirements and enables us to have continuous monitoring of risky situations.'

One respondent observed that OiRA is very useful in terms of enabling diagnosis of the company, permitting a continuous improvement process, and preventing all legal consequences related to OSH. Moreover, the tool enabled the company to have all relevant documents in the same electronic file.

At the same time, while generally a structured exercise, there was a view that there is also **room for creativity in OiRA**. During the RA, some points may emerge and OiRA enables the creation of new ideas. 'The RA allows for a kind of brainstorming.' Also, flexibility is appreciated: 'That's why I like this software, because it's adaptable and you can manipulate it.'

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*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**

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- **Level of detail in the tools**

Some of the findings point towards diverging opinions about the functionality of the tool. Mainly, while certain companies appreciated excellent tailoring to their needs and circumstances, others highlighted that OiRA is sometimes too general. On the contrary, some respondents commented that the tool is sometimes too precise for a small company (e.g., for aspects like air renewal system, fire risks, electrical risks, delivery points and handling equipment).

Several respondents who overall reported a very good experience using OiRA commented that sometimes the tool is too general. They noted that it would be helpful if it was even more specific and tailored to the sector, for example, to address issues specific to mobile construction sites. One interviewee noted that the tool is useful and enabled the company to keep its ISO 14 001 certification, but it remained too general, and the company has to adapt it according to its needs.

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*Even if we can choose the sector of activity, the tool is not personalised enough.*

**Manager, car repair shop**

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This sentiment was shared by others who observed that some questions were not relevant to their sector (education, opticians), but they skipped them and focused on questions of concern. 'The questions are numerous and detailed and some of them do not concern us, but it is better to have more than less.'

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*OIRA should take more into account the reality of the company and therefore the context (e.g. office layout) so that the recommendations are pertinent.*

**Accountant, accounting services**

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Also, some questions were considered repetitive.

Overall, the questions in OiRA are deemed to be clear but sometimes judged to be lacking detail and context. For example, one company has only two steps but still selected the sections inherent to stairs. The interviewee from this company said that it would also be useful if the tool could clarify the context of the questions.

A respondent from a small veterinary company stated that some Yes/No answers are too binary and that this approach does not allow for nuance. For example, the Yes/No answer options to the question 'Did you already consider/implement the following risk/measure?' does not allow for nuance as it does not capture various stages.

While the study sample is too small to make definite generalisations, it seems that it was some of the smallest companies reporting the tool to be 'too detailed', while larger companies, by contrast, found it too generic at times.

It appears that companies new to OiRA tend to see it as sufficiently detailed, with the layout easy to navigate and questions adequately phrased (especially those that had already completed one or two RAs with OiRA). The companies that had used the tool for several years, albeit generally assessing it positively, had more substantial comments on possible improvements.

- **OiRA uses plain and accessible language**

Overall, the language used in the tool is judged positively. OiRA questions and measures are very well phrased, and the language used is accessible. It was positively judged by the respondents. They found OiRA useful and easy to use, and they especially appreciated the online brochures from INRS.

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*The language and flow is very clear both for the questions and the measures.*

*CEO, services for young people*

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OiRA's simple language is an asset as 'experts who work in the industry sometimes use overcomplicated language, while it should actually be in plain language and easy to understand, since we want to prevent accidents from happening.' Another observed: 'As soon as you read the questions, you understand what they are about.'

### **2.1.5 Ideas and areas for improvement**

Several interesting ideas for further improvement of OiRA were put forward by the users. They concern technical issues, ideas for new content and features. Some were very specific, while others hinted at where improvements could be made, without necessarily giving clear pointers as to how to get there. What was interesting during the study was that almost all OiRA users offered some comments and ideas about the tool. This indicates that they feel reasonably comfortable and fluent in terms of using the tool and were as a result able to critically assess it.

- **New segments and features**

Respondents to the study suggested adding new features or functionalities to the tool. One such item could be *presque accident* (near accident/near miss), which is a dangerous situation that almost resulted in an accident.

It was also suggested that the tool could also **propose service providers when renovations are needed** so the company does not waste time looking for this information. Another respondent suggested adding a feature with **updates on any changes in OSH regulations** of which employers should be aware.

Receiving **reminders** about when to implement measures would also be very helpful, in the view of two respondents, as would an annual reminder to complete the RA. One commented that there is no possibility of following up on the action plan or setting reminders. 'For example, for people working in a computer centre, we have compulsory training that allows them to enter the computer centre and make interventions. In the action plan, it is specified that we have to provide this training but there are no reminders (every six months for instance) saying whether the individuals hired during the last six months

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*What could be useful is to receive updates on any changes in regulations we should be aware of. This could be anything really. At the moment, it is sometimes difficult to find out what are the current sanitary COVID-19 prevention measures. Sometimes the information you find is contradictory.*

*Co-owner, restaurant*

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have properly followed their training.’ The view was that having this kind of reminder would be useful because it would mean that it would not need an actual person in the company to think about this.

One respondent who had conducted one RA with OiRA so far mentioned the lack of **personalised solutions** to solve a problem. ‘Adding a chat in which we could ask questions and get concrete answers or links that would send us back to these answers would be practical.’ A manager of a hairdressing salon and an optician suggested adding to OiRA links to pages where more information can be found, as this would motivate them to implement the measures from the action plan. A representative of an e-commerce company observed that the software is useful, but more video content and more thematic fiches would be appreciated. Another suggestion was adding more questions at the beginning of the RA about the structure and the size of the company. ‘The aim is to learn more about the company by asking questions at the beginning, to then even more accurately tailor the measures.’

Lastly, one respondent observed that a tool which facilitates the progressive work on OSH would add value. This could track progress and build on what had been done rather than replace it. Such a feature is already used in some OiRA tools but not in all of them, and therefore this feedback might have been from a user of one of the tools not using that feature.

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*I would like a tool that validates what has been done (in terms of OSH in the workplace) and is constantly renewed rather than starting over each time.*

**Manager, optician sector**

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Other ideas include the possibility of printing two OiRA reports, a comprehensive one for the person in charge of it (completing RA) and one tailored to specific groups of employees.

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*An automatic OiRA report for employees that would remove items that do not concern them could be useful. The idea is to have two OiRA reports, i.e. one for the person who performs the RA and another for the employees.*

**Manager, beauty salon**

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#### ▪ **Action plan**

Several comments were made regarding the format and usefulness of the action plan feature. One observation was that the action plan is a little too long and technical (but still it is easy to find proposed measures). According to a manager from a car repair shop, the action plan remains general. ‘For major areas, it suits me but sometimes I have very specific questions, and this is not reflected in the action plan. For me it remains unclear.’

#### ▪ **Communication with others**

One respondent suggested a ‘more universal and collaborative tool so that companies can exchange and provide each other with advice related to OSH in the workplace.’ This was mirrored in another interview in which creating a space for discussions for companies was suggested. ‘The aim is to collect testimonials from companies of the same sector and size on OSH topics, e.g., how to successfully implement an action plan.’

- **Need for modern and fun layout**

A large group of respondents said that they would like OiRA to be more colourful, modern, and fun. Inserting more colourful pictures to illustrate risks would be a nice addition, and there could also be emoticons. 'The website seems a little bit sad without colours.' Another respondent commented: 'We are on a software which dates from the 2010s. I would like to switch to a more user-friendly, interactive, and colourful software. The content is there but the form needs to be revised.'

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*OiRA remains reliable with the INRS guarantee but could be a little more user-friendly, fun and colorful.*

**Manager, telecommunications sector**

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Some suggested adding more colours so the tool appears 'less institutional and more modern.' The interface could be more welcoming because it is a bit 'dry' sometimes.

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*The tool is practical but it still looks like an administrative form. It's very simple but it's not a tool for creativity or reflection.*

**Accountant, accounting services**

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- **Possible certification**

Since companies report that they would use the OiRA report during the labour inspection; they would also find it helpful if OiRA provided a certificate that is externally accepted as proof of completion. A certificate was deemed to be an added value. One respondent admitted that the certificate would be useful for administrative matters, although acknowledging that the OiRA report is already very legitimate. The fact that it has the 'OiRA logo' makes it 'more official comparing it to an Excel or word document.'

- **Going beyond the tools: on-site visits and personalised assistance**

The need for on-site support was mentioned by some interviewees. Two commented that they would like there to be a person who comes and sees how they work and tells them if OSH is being handled correctly. This could be somebody representing OiRA but also any other relevant institution. 'This visit would kind of confirm if what is noted in the RA is the reality in the company, even if it means paying for it.' Another interviewee reflected that personalised assistance related to legislation would help when implementing the action plan. For example, one respondent appreciated the OHA's advice to use a specific module for a specific post in the company, as she felt that she could have spent a lot of time finding the appropriate module. One company, which had completed one RA with OiRA so far, reported that it planned to involve external services next time.

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*A good idea would be to have a personalised follow-up, for example a person in charge of the inspection of the site who could answer questions and propose recommendations according to the company's context.*

**Accountant, accountancy services**

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One respondent advised that the help he received from an OSH service provider was important, and he felt this somehow necessary for initial navigation of OiRA. ‘With a little external help from an OSH professional, everybody would be able to do RA with the software.’ It was felt that this type of help is needed to better understand the risks and to know what types of risks to enter, meaning that this is more about the content than the technical aspects of an RA.

▪ **Would they recommend OiRA to others?**

All the respondents consulted during the study said that they would recommend OiRA to others, especially small businesses. Some would recommend OiRA to other enterprises because ‘it’s a really simple RA tool’, while **others judge it as serious** and efficient. As one interviewee observed, ‘We thanked the colleague who presented us the tool.’

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*Maybe it’s not the most creative tool but it doesn’t take us much time and it’s free. You can use it as a first tool and then move to another more powerful software if needed but for me, OiRA suits me.*

**Accountant, accounting services**

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Several had already spoken about OiRA to colleagues in other companies and recommended it mainly because it saves time. One respondent, who was introduced to OiRA by a colleague, highly recommended it and had already inspired a colleague who also worked in a small enterprise in the construction sector.

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*I talked about this tool with someone who wanted to start a company. I said that I used OiRA and it was very helpful. I would highly recommend it.*

**Manager, pharmacy**

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A manager of a beauty salon said that she would recommend OiRA but acknowledged that some level of digital literacy is needed, and she was not sure if that is readily available among small businesses. Another one saw the advantage of using OiRA to comply with the ISO 14001 standard.

Another interviewee said that he would recommend OiRA to other companies from any sector (industrial, road transport, tertiary) and especially to companies that are not yet very advanced in their approach to and awareness of OSH. ‘The tool will allow companies to discharge a lot of work from them and give a boost regarding OSH issues within the company.’ He highlighted the value of OiRA even for companies with processes that are already defined, stating that the tool would allow them to enrich information or to find alternatives. For example, there are companies with defined OSH procedures but with no tools, which means that they are doing everything manually, which is time-consuming.

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*With OIRA, we already have a framework, a skeleton that we only have to enrich, and everything is done by itself. This technological side should not be neglected.*

**Manager**

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### 2.1.6 What is the impact of RA and OiRA specifically?

While it is difficult to objectively assess the impact that RAs and the use of OiRA in particular have had on the levels of OSH in companies, the study explored several aspects of this. Firstly, interviewees were asked whether completing RAs with OiRA led to companies becoming aware of any new risks, those they would not have considered otherwise. Second, the study investigated the extent to which companies had implemented measures included in the action plan. Lastly, interviewees were asked for the perceived impact that the RA with OiRA might have had on OSH in the respective establishment.

- **Did OiRA point out OSH aspects that companies did not previously consider?**

For many companies, OiRA highlighted OSH aspects that the company had not considered before. For one company, this was a risk related to cybersecurity and data on computers and smartphones, while for another it was safety concerns related to the building. One company reported that OiRA made it consider OSH risks that they had not been aware of before, such as manipulating heavy objects. Other examples include a newcomer to OiRA reporting that ‘thanks to OiRA, we considered new things, especially in relation to telework.’ They are therefore planning to draw up a guidance on telework and to remind people of the risks, good postures and so on. Another concrete example is the temperature in the office of one company. ‘We were not aware that there was an optimal temperature for work. Since then, we blocked the temperature at 21 degrees.’

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*A concrete example is the measurement of the air quality that we use for the buildings, it allows us to measure the level of dust. We considered this risk thanks to the OiRA tool.*

*Manager, construction sector*

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OiRA revealed risks related to payments and to working time (such as opening and closing hours of the business) and the safety of employees in relation to this. Others gave very concrete practical examples, such as the type of scissors used in a hairdressing salon, the arrangement of a store and the fact that employees should use gloves. One respondent appreciated the fact that OiRA made them aware of psychosocial risks. Other aspects highlighted were the risk of aggression from animals and risks related to driving.

Two respondents commented that OiRA did not lead to any new knowledge in their case, since they have been doing their work for many years. ‘When you work in the same environment for a long time, you know the risks.’

- **Have the companies implemented measures proposed by OiRA?**

Companies strived to implement the measures proposed in OiRA, observing that ‘there are things that are easy to implement but others that take some more time and investment, e.g., if we have to buy new equipment/products.’ Another commented that ‘It’s a lot of work. Just to arrange an office, you have to take into account the windows, the doors, and a lot of other criteria. To organise everything in the right

way, we would almost have to change the furniture. The company did its best, but it is not ideal and there are always things to improve.'

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*Often we started reflecting on some issues, but as many other companies, we do not have the dedicated resources to implement them fully.*

**Managing Director, veterinary sector**

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Another stated: 'I try to respect the legislation as much as possible but don't implement all the measures due to a lack of time.' Some measures are very simple to implement, and sometimes employees can contribute to this by respecting the regulations. Others are more complicated to put in place, especially from a financial perspective, as they require a long-term investment. 'Knowing that we are a small enterprise, it is even more complicated to put in place costly measures. We have to search for financing etc. ... so it is difficult to quickly comply with the standards.'

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*For some measures, large renovation work is needed, and we can't move the walls or the premises.*

**Manager, hairdressing salon**

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Other measures highlighted are more on the organisational side, such as introducing automatic reminders to encourage employees to report risks and/or problems.

It is acknowledged that some measures can be delicate and require more time, more resources, and more training, whereas others can be implemented quickly.

One company reported that, overall, implementing the proposed measures was easy and simple but for some measures it was necessary to work upfront to find the right partner with whom to work (i.e., OSH institutions) in order to implement these solutions. A representative of a construction company referred to individual measures and behavioural aspects and observed that 'it is quite easy to implement the proposed measures, but the real issue is the respect of those measures. Putting measures in place doesn't necessarily mean that employees comply with them.'

Another company commented on the prioritisation of measures, from the perspective of their impact. If measures are related to the health and safety of employees, they are implemented quickly, but those related to good organisation of work and the good functioning of the business are not always respected. 'I think that it is another matter to make the action plan respected. Our job is to disseminate it and put it into practice, but it is more difficult to control it.'

▪ **Did OiRA have any perceived impact on OSH in the company?**

For the companies with better established OSH practices, impact of OiRA is less visible. As one respondent reported, 'the OiRA tool didn't change much. It is an accompaniment and support, but the company already had the approach to promote health and safety at work even before using the tool.' Another respondent said that it did not feel that it complied with OSH any more rigorously: 'We are very sensitive to health and safety at work and OiRA has nothing to do with it.'

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*I think that better respecting OSH is not the right term, but rather better taking it into account. Prior to OiRA, we also complied with OSH but with the tools we had at that time. With OiRA, the company is better equipped to conduct the RA.*

**Manager, transport and logistics**

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Impact is highlighted more strongly by companies that are new to systematic RA. One observed that since the company started using OiRA and started consulting employees, they are now more aware of OSH. This respondent felt the company now complies with OSH to a greater extent due to OiRA.

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*I would say that the tool made it easier to fill out the information, but it wasn't OiRA that triggered my compliance with the obligations. It was my initiative to respect health and safety in the workplace because in our company the human value is fundamental. But yes, indeed, the OiRA tool facilitated the task.*

**Manager, pharmacy**

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In the case of one company that recently completed their first RA with OiRA, entering information into the 'COVID-19' module had already led to the introduction of new measures (disinfectant wipes, disinfectant spray, providing small hydroalcoholic gels in cars). In addition, it was noted that the company will probably set up an IT and teleworking guidance for employees, respecting aspects such as the right to disconnect.

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*We have to do it very often [the RA], it's an ongoing process which requires a lot of resilience (endurance) but we see the results at the end. Safety and health at work continues to be part of the company's culture thanks to this kind of tool. It allows us to maintain the wellbeing and a certain profitability if everything runs smoothly.*

**Manager, transport**

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OiRA has allowed another company to explore certain elements in greater detail. For example, when the company welcomes customers, they now manage these visits better by avoiding overcrowded places and so on. According to this interviewee, 'These are basic things, but they deserve a reminder.'

The positive impact of involving employees also has an impact in terms of OSH practice, as confirmed by one respondent.

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*Before OiRA we used to do RA considering less details and also in a less formal and precise way. Basically, we did it verbally and often after an accident had happened. But this did not work well because it was always the employers' fault when things went wrong. Now everything is written and co-decided, and we follow the plan of action.*

*Employee, waste management sector*

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OiRA is considered to be 'super useful', especially in terms of financial savings due to avoidance of accidents. One respondent reported that the previous year they had zero accidents at the company, and she attributed this to the use of OiRA. Another company had a lot of sick leave for back pain and carpal tunnel problems. The tool allowed the company to identify risks that had not been considered before: 'A human can't think of everything and identify all of the potential risks.'

## 2.2 Companies using other online software

Six companies consulted in this study reported using some sort of interactive RA software/tool other than OiRA. The products mentioned are all commercial applications. These tools are largely general management software, with components or segments dedicated to OSH.

Overall, companies opting for dedicated RA software (or using general management software with an RA component) can be categorised largely as high performers in OSH. They cite **motivation for conducting RA beyond the legal obligations, showing good understanding of the business case for increased safety and health**. They are also **willing to make the necessary purchases to follow the measures developed through RA**. They are explicit in explaining their needs in terms of RA and why specific solutions work for them, in addition to what could be improved. For the most part, they are not new to RA, having several years of experience. Some have experience with OiRA, which they judge to be a good tool for beginners but a limited option for companies that are more advanced in terms of OSH. Companies currently reporting using software for RA have **used Excel or other online tools in the past, pointing to their readiness to change and explore new options** (one respondent mentioned to have abandoned a former online solution since it was neither simple nor clear in their opinion).

The following sectors were represented in the sample: construction, mining, recycling, HORECA, real estate and tourism. In terms of size, they include a broad range of companies and cannot be described as generally bigger companies compared to the rest of the sample. Interestingly, a small restaurant also reported using an online tool.

**The frequency in terms of carrying out RA varies from daily reports to weekly sessions to several times a year.** Several companies reported a systematic RA approach, to which people at different levels of the company contributed, including line managers, directors, and employees. Respondents seemed to appreciate the value of RA and know about its challenges. Some commented that it is time-consuming, while others stated that they feel they do not spend enough time on it. This is especially true in case of smaller businesses in which carrying out an RA is seen to be yet another task for general managers on top of their daily work. While generally satisfied with the tools used, respondents said that they would appreciate solutions that are less time-consuming. A manager in a restaurant commented that due to lack of time, she would prefer a tool that is simple, well-rounded and tailored to her work context.

In the following section, a very brief overview of the main tools and their features is given, based on the descriptions given by the interviewees. It was decided to keep the tool names anonymous since the feedback on each of these tools is only based on one interview and as such should not be taken as general review/feedback on the described applications.

#### ▪ Tool A

Tool A is a general financial software package that offers a 'Risk management' module to manage RA and produce the DUER. To conduct the RA, the administrative and financial director (also responsible for HR) liaises with team managers who communicate the relevant information daily. Each week, the director has feedback on employees' wellbeing. Then they fill in the cells in the software, trying to give as accurate a picture as possible. When they have doubts, 'they call people who are competent to answer their questions and produce a risk assessment that is as accurate as possible.' The interviewee explained that they received help when installing both the software package and the specific RA module. When purchasing Tool A, the 'maintenance' service is included. This related to both technical support but also assistance regarding tax and accounting laws. The company reported to **always receive support if they have questions related to the tool**. For example, the interviewee said that he could ask the external support team a question that would be answered by a lawyer.

The interviewee said that the RA process is 'never straight forward.' They conduct the RA as seriously as possible, **producing new grids every year to be as realistic as possible** and not following old grids, for example. He receives regular notifications from a specific journal on OSH and they fill in the cells with the updates in mind. A Word document is produced, distinct from the DUER, containing all recommended measures. This can be downloaded.

#### ▪ Tool B

Tool B is an online tool, with the possibility of working offline, that allows companies to manage several risk categories at the same time, for example, risk management, HR management, training management and ethics management. According to the interviewee, the advantage is that the tool is complete with a lot of features and several risk management categories. This is a 'tailored tool which adapts to all companies and all types of risks.' The software includes features that enable risks and work-related accidents to be reported and the DUER to be created and modified. It also includes features that enable the creation of graphs and tables, thus displaying valuable statistics and information related to occupational health in the company. To use the tool, the company must pay a licence fee that allows it to have several accounts. Employees who have access to the software (usually employees from the HR and safety departments) are autonomous and can add/modify risks on their own. The firm can download the action plan/report that mentions the positive points and the areas for improvement. The company interviewed did not encounter any difficulties with Tool B and they did not need any external support.

#### ▪ Tool C

**Tool C** is software for carrying out RA online. In the interviewed company, several people are responsible for updating it, including the employee in charge of production and quality (including OSH), the production manager and two to three machine operators. It is **updated every time the company buys a new machine, but it also includes a section part on RA**. The company director is then responsible for implementing the measures. In the past, this company used an Excel sheet to carry out the RA. Starting with Tool C was made easier by the fact that the **software producer provided a consultant**. RA with Tool C was considered to be **quite time-consuming by the respondent**. Completing the first RA took around four to five days, and updating it takes one to two days on average. All the new machines that are added need to be reviewed in the software and this is done **annually**. It is considered to be quite basic in terms of what it offers, yet not very simple to use, according to the respondent, offering a list of risks to choose from while the company needs to develop corresponding measures. The final document can then be printed. The interviewee judged the software to be relatively inexpensive compared to other options, costing around 100 EUR per annum.

- **Tool D**

Tool D is a planning and management software system that can be used online and offline. It is not sector specific. According to the interviewee, it has a feature that proposes measures based on the risks inserted in the tool. It is **not free**, however, the interviewee reported that they **lacked support or guidance on how to use it**. It is possible to insert specific information relevant to the company and employees.

- **Tool E**

Tool E is a sector specific software system initially devised by a construction company. It is an interactive tool and makes it easier to collaborate with the finance team, for example, through sending messages and inserting pictures directly into the software. The interviewee explained that this RA approach aimed to be more efficient, profitable and to respond to a need for quality as they are an ISO 9001 certified company. The software is focused on the construction sector. According to the respondent, it is collaborative, simple to use, sector specific and it does suggest action plans. The interviewee's role (department head) is to control and prevent the risks whereas her team leaders' role is to flag risks but not necessarily to propose solutions. She monitors risks on a daily basis and formally reports the information to her hierarchy once a month. They work fully online, although everything is available for download.

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*Having an online tool is more comfortable because the RA process is more automated, and we have an exhaustive report at the end of it. It also saves time and productivity*

*Manager, construction sector*

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While overall assessed positively, the interviewee felt that there was room for improvement in this tool. Visualising, prioritising and having an overall view of all the risks was deemed challenging, as many risks are identified. The interviewee stressed the importance of configuring privacy settings in the cloud (i.e., in the software, which she described as a cloud). Another difficulty recalled was accessing the software on site. At first, she said that it was not easy to use the software on smartphones. The company has been using Pythagore for four years. They bought it only once (i.e., it is not a subscription) at a price between 15,000 EUR and 20,000 EUR which was judged as very expensive by the interviewee. She explained that, at the time, the management was hesitant to go with it, but it had proven efficient.

They all had a 2-day training to learn how to use the software. Despite the training, the interviewee acknowledged that it was initially very difficult to use. Consequently, the company organised another round of training, which 75% of initial attendants attended. Now, the interviewee thought that she knows very well how to work with the software. During the first year, a hotline was included to enable users to seek assistance.

- **Tool F**

According to one respondent, several people in the company have access to this software, that is, the management, HR manager and other people within the HR department. The RA is conducted at least once a year. Within the software, there is a **regulatory monitoring** section that sets out the obligations and rules that the company must respect. Via the software, the company receives informative articles and newsletters. Prior to Tool F, the company used an Excel sheet and conducted the RA manually. The company did not encounter any technical problems relating to the tool since a technician oversees the software if there is a problem (the technician is internal to the company). The tool was easy to use and was recommended to the company by an employee working in another enterprise. However, it was reported to be difficult for the company to gather all the necessary data to feed the software and the RA. 'It can be done in one day if we already have all the data' but compiling all the necessary data can take more than a week sometimes.

### 2.2.1 What motivates companies to carry out RAs?

The companies consulted revealed different types of motivation for carrying out systematic RAs. The primary reason was to **avoid accidents and ensure the safety and health of the employees**. The legal obligation to carry out an RA, while acknowledged, does not occupy a primary place. Rather, RA is approached from the perspective of business operation. It is seen as a **way to avoid high levels of absence**, a situation that could lead to the closing down of the business.

Overall, it is understood that an RA is good for the business: as one restaurant manager commented, carrying out an RA ‘makes the general management of the restaurant simpler.’ Additionally, carrying out an RA helps companies to review their knowledge of OSH and verify whether they are up to date with relevant regulations.

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*RA fits the company's values because a company is first and foremost people who work for it ... It's both legal considerations and the humane aspect, i.e. the health and safety/wellbeing of our employees.*

**Administrative and Financial Director, mining industry**

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While the need for an RA is evident in industries with significant exposure to accidents and health risks, in the sample companies that are limited to office work also acknowledged the importance of systematic OSH reviews. As one manager observed: ‘We don't operate on construction sites so there are not great risks, we are more concerned with psychosocial risks.’

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*There is the need to anticipate risks, to be quicker in making decisions and bringing better solutions as risks are costly to the business.*

**Manager, construction company**

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According to the sample, an RA also helps to gain a good overview of the company operations, to ‘know why some people are more likely to be on sick leave than others’, and it is an important element ‘to ensure that the company's construction project goes smoothly.’ This is not explained as a commercial motivation but rather a ‘contractual; one (i.e., obligation to complete/comply with the contract with the client). In this context, the RA is understood as part of the company's responsibility for guaranteeing the cost and the timescale of an operation. These motivations to a certain extent correspond to the fact that respondents in this group opted for a software that allows RA to be integrated into the broader operating system, for example, connecting to HR and/or the finance department. OSH is not seen as a stand-alone issue but part of the larger approach in these companies, which classifies them as high performers.

## 2.2.2 How do the companies find information about OSH and RA approaches?

The companies in this sample used various sources and channels to inform themselves about OSH and RA. Key channels included:

- external consulting companies, including audit companies and training services;
- public authority websites (such as Sécurité Sociale,<sup>24</sup> which sends relevant OSH information to HR managers, and CARSAT<sup>25</sup>); and
- specialised magazines related to safety, human resources, and company laws (for example, Francis Lefebvre, which provides information about all the legal obligations of companies).

One company highlighted the position of an SPST (*sureté, protection des travailleurs*) coordinator who informs them on a monthly basis, gathering information from journals about all the new legislation, norms, problems with staff or work stoppages (*arrêt de travail*). The company also employs a legal coordinator who carries out spot checks to ensure that operations are lawful. This coordinator has login credentials for the software and inputs observations directly into the software.

In terms of looking for RA approaches, the Internet seems to be the most popular way of doing so. One employee reported looking online for a functional tool that would replace the Excel sheet the company was using. They wanted a tool that would be **updated based on current OSH regulations**, and as reported, it was not easy to find one. Another respondent also reported searching online for information but admitted to feeling lost and not having enough information about RA options or software. She was not happy with the tool currently used but does not feel able to make informed choices about other solutions.

In the case of another company, the key path for finding the RA tool was to investigate **whether the software already used by the company for other purposes might offer options supporting RA**. They naturally called providers of other software used already at the company for financial purposes and asked if they had a relevant module/feature. The respondent did not feel the need to look up other options since Tool A already had a module for RA and stated that he would only have looked for other providers if this pre-guided search had not revealed adequate tools.

## 2.2.3 Who takes the final decision about a tool and why are specific tools selected?

The final decision about selecting a specific tool/software was made by management in all the reviewed cases. Several of the tools cited were costly. In none of the reviewed cases were the employees consulted during the process of selecting the RA approach.

The tools were selected for several reasons. The fact that certain solutions were integrated into the overall management software of the company was important and felt like a natural solution. Secondly, the fact that certain software came with the support of a consultant to help set it up and technical support later on was considered an advantage. In one case, it was also bundled with insurance support (the company makes insurance claims to the same company and completes RA reports as necessary for this). Lastly, one argument in favour of specific solutions was the fact that the software included updates about changing laws and regulations.

Interestingly, in the case of the smallest establishment in this sample (restaurant), the manager did not feel that she had enough information when deciding on an RA tool.

<sup>24</sup> The Sécurité Sociale website is available at: <https://www.securite-sociale.fr/accueil>

<sup>25</sup> CARSAT is for occupational health and pension insurance funds. The official website is available at: <https://www.lassuranceretraite.fr/portail-info/home.html>

One company chose their current online tool as a replacement for OiRA, which they had used in the past. They judged OiRA to be a good, simple, and free tool for RA, but limited for their purposes.

OiRA seems to be generally considered great for beginners when doing a first RA, but the company in question wanted more functionalities and a more comprehensive tool in terms of assessing multiple risk categories such as HR management and training management and not only occupational risk management.

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*OiRA is simple to use but limited in what it covers. It just allows you to be in compliance with regulations. The tool is easy to perform an RA, but it is still a basic tool for beginners. It is a software that we used at the beginning, but which has a certain limit and we switched to Tool B.*

**Quality Safety and Environment inspector,  
construction sector**

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#### **2.2.4 What do the respondents appreciate in the tools used and approaches taken?**

Representatives of companies using different online tools for RA were clear about what they appreciated in the chosen solutions, and these largely overlapped with the reasons for selecting them in the first place. Key added value included: offering regulatory updates, being integrated into a general software used by the company for other purposes, support from consultants, being tailored to the sector, the possibility of customisation and being easy to use.

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*... I didn't encounter any obstacles. The template has already been created and now it's only updating the information, so the process is much faster. On average I would say that it takes me two hours per year.*

**Quality Safety and Environment inspector,  
construction sector**

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The second element that clearly stood out is the compatibility of the tools with other systems used at the company (for example, financial management software) or that the tool also offers non-OSH segments on planning and accounting. This integration into the company's larger management structure and system contributes to smoother communication between relevant departments and units, and it facilitates exchanges and information sharing. Such an approach fosters efficiency, which is considered essential. One respondent mentioned the usefulness of an internal chat, which ensures that risks are communicated to the relevant person.

The additional value of the several solutions analysed here comes from their tailoring to the specific needs and contexts in which companies operate. One company benefited from the fact that their tool can be personalised by incorporating information relevant to the company, adding risks and indicators, or hierarchising the risks so that the most important ones are at the top. Another highlighted the fact that the tool is sector specific and therefore sensitive to risks relating to their industry.

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*We have a ready-to-use solution where you just have to collect and enter the data. What is good is that the software is easily manageable, flexible, and we can add our own risk and indicators.*

#### **Manager, real estate and tourism**

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The support that comes with the tool is highly appreciated: this includes help in setting up the tool and initial training about RA but also the availability of consultation throughout the operation of the software. As one respondent reported, they were supported by consultants who helped them to set up their RA and understand how to use the tool and what parameters were needed to fit as closely as possible to their company's activities. This was especially important as, at first, using the tool was not intuitive. Once it was set up, it became easier.

On a technical note, simplicity and being easy to use stands out among the most appreciated features. This in some cases is paired with useful visualisation of data. As one respondent reported, 'there are a lot of indicators, tables and diagrams which makes the work easier when we have to provide a report for the management.' Additionally, some tools offer the possibility to enter data/update them in real time (for instance, when an accident occurs), while others can be accessed via phones and do not require the use of a keyboard.

One respondent appreciated that the tool is *ludique* (user-friendly, playful). For example, to postpone a deadline, they can use the mouse cursor as if switching the volume of a track. This interviewee also liked the fact that everything in the software is automatised and updated in real time.

### **2.2.5 What would they change or improve in their tools?**

Overall, the respondents were satisfied with the tools they were using, except for one. Some respondents commented that the tools they use, albeit useful, were in their view costly. Further, tailoring to the context of the companies was mentioned by the enterprises that did not use sector specific tools.

Regarding specific features, one respondent commented that it would be good if measures were proposed based on the risks selected, since their tool did not have this feature. Another issue raised was the need for further tailoring of access, allowing access for multiple users or other tools (for example, mobile application).

On a more OSH-related and less technical note, a need for guidance on prioritising risks emerged. One respondent commented that this task is not easy and with many risks identified, support with prioritising would be appreciated.

A call for making tools simpler and less time-consuming came from the representative of the smallest enterprise in the sample.

## 2.2.6 How are employees involved in RA?

Four out of the six companies report some form of employee involvement in the RA, although the scope and character of this varies. Some explicitly see the value of employee involvement, pointing to increased ownership and the fact that employees are more eager to follow the measures if they are part of the RA process.

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*Involving employees helps to have them follow the measures and hence reduce accidents.*

**Employee, metal works sector**

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The same companies also did not see any particular challenges in terms of involving employees. In the case of a company operating in the mining sector, the involvement of employees in RA was viewed as essential. This interviewee stated that they 'must' involve employees since there are different types of risks, such as workers involved in extraction or drivers who drive potentially dangerous vehicles.

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*The advantage of involving employees is that they are on the ground and can see risks that the management or others don't see.*

**HR Manager, Real estate and tourism**

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The RA process in the mining company includes two trade unions currently representing employees within the company. The management asks for employee feedback regarding health and safety issues every month, and they report no problems in engaging them. Employees are 'fully convinced' because 'it's their health and safety that's updated.' According to the interviewee, employees appreciate the monitoring and the efforts, and they explicitly thanked the management for different actions that were implemented.

Another company reported involving employees in RA, although this process seemed to be reduced to the fact that employees can report problems or risks that they are facing and communicate them to either HR or the management. The results of the RA are not communicated to employees, and this is justified by the fact that they contain confidential data (information about medical records, sick leave). Only the management and the HR department have access to this.

One company reported reluctance on the side of employees when software was introduced. Switching to the online tool was perceived by employees as intrusive control and an additional source of pressure. This was partly attributed to bad timing. The approach was introduced because company operations were not deemed profitable enough. According to this respondent, employees felt that this software was forcing them to consider risks they did not really want to consider.

Another company reported that employees do not participate actively in the RA but are informed of any changes related to occupational health through management reviews and monthly webinars.

### 2.2.7 How do they assess the impact of RA?

There was agreement among the respondents that carrying out RAs and following up with measures helps improve OSH at the company.

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*RA certainly improved working conditions at the company, we invested quite a bit in making them better for the employees, for example we reduced the amount of toxic fumes that the workers are exposed to.*

**Employee, metal works sector**

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Companies implement the measures, since, as a director in the mining industry stated, otherwise he '[does not] see the point of putting a risk assessment procedure in place.' To this end, his company invested in better suited vehicles and changes in work organisation. They put several measures into place, both corrective actions and 'embellishment' of working rules within the company. These measures improved OSH at the company.

Another respondent noted certain challenges when implementing the measures. While the company tried to implement the proposed measures, 'some can't be implemented right away, it takes time. Sometimes we have to organise training and it can take months.'

Responses included direct attribution of positive changes to the use of specific software. The tools made it possible to take into account things that the company had not considered before, for instance, they improved the ergonomics within the office by changing the seats and the location of the desks.

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*Doing RA ... has improved the health and safety of employees. There are fewer work-related accidents and a better communication within the enterprise.*

**Quality Safety and Environment inspector, construction sector**

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Another interviewee felt that implementing the measures greatly improved OSH in the company. With the tool, they were able to anticipate problems to a greater extent and hold the relevant people accountable. She also argued that having written records was an additional value. It made reflection and analysis easier and identifying why things did not go according to plan or were delayed is made simpler if systematic documentation is in place.

### 2.2.8 Would they be interested in OiRA?

Respondents who reported using other online tools were somehow reluctant to the idea of testing OiRA. Two respondents had never heard of it. While several have heard of the tool, none was eager to test it and they did not have a comprehensive picture of what it offered. One interviewee saw OiRA advertised on an internal platform dedicated to security and defence, so she thought it was only for that sector. Accordingly, she thought it may be **useful to make it clearer that OiRA is adaptable to different sectors**. Even the restaurant in the study sample, which was not satisfied with the tool currently used,

although it had heard about OiRA in the past, did not feel motivated to explore it further, without naming concrete reasons for this.

One respondent reported that he had heard previously about OiRA through the audit firm that validates the company's financial statements. The audit firm told him that the OiRA software was working well for client risk management, and the respondent did not know that OiRA was free. The interviewee said that he would not be interested in using OiRA at the moment, but that he would not rule out this option at some point in the future. He recalled that the company used to work with another tool but that they have changed to Tool A, so if the company changes their current software and the new tool had no risk management solution, OiRA could be an option.

Hesitation to test OiRA stemmed from a doubt about whether it would be possible to use this with other, general management software in place at the company. This was considered important as the goal for a company is to have a coherent system across various operations, tasks, and segments. If OiRA cannot be integrated, the need to manage accounting and risk management with two different tools would be 'unnecessarily complicated.'

The issue of simplicity and user-friendliness was highlighted by many. One interviewee said that he would not be interested in using OiRA if he felt that it was too difficult to use/understand, because he would not feel comfortable teaching his employees how to use the tool. He admitted that OiRA would be appealing if it is efficient and easy to use. However, if it required 'a very fast broadband and lots of different cells to fill', or if it was 'too technical' then he wouldn't be interested.

## 2.3 Companies using offline tools

Eight of the companies consulted in this study employed what could be called a 'traditional' approach to RA. This entails using Excel grids and/or relying on external OSH service providers for RA. Some companies mix both approaches, filling out Excel tables but consulting on these with external OSH service providers or public service providers.

The frequency with which RA is carried out varies significantly. One company (transportation of recycling waste) said that RAs are carried out daily by filling out a report covering all relevant employees, and aggregated data are analysed on monthly basis by an external service — CHSCT au travail.<sup>26</sup> Another enterprise (construction) conducted RAs based on all new assignments/locations. Generally, most companies report RA as an annual activity.

One company (animal shelter) in this sample lacked a systematic approach: they stated that they had completed only one one-off RA analysis several years ago and not updated it since. In fact, a week before the interview for this study, they received a letter from CARSAT alerting them to a particularly high level of accidents at this workplace (dog bites), and this led to the need for them to complete a questionnaire issued by CARSAT. The respondent found the questionnaire to be particularly difficult. This situation may prompt them to explore other systematic RA options.

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<sup>26</sup> The CHSCT, committee for health, safety and working conditions, is an organisation representing staff present in establishments with at least 50 employees. The CHSCT is responsible for the protection of workers, particularly in terms of hygiene, health and safety.

Several of the companies showed limited understanding of what constitutes RA. One reduced the concept to fire drills and first aid. Some were not aware of their duty to carry out an RA and create a DUER and relied on external companies to inform them about necessary safety measures regarding fire risks. Another company seemed to be taking not a preventive but a reactive approach to dealing with risks in the company. This respondent saw BDESE<sup>27</sup> (economic, social, and **environmental** database) as the core basis for their RA. The document includes a range of data about employees (e.g., sick leave). The company states that they use this document to assess potential risks in the workplace. The document is filled by the HR manager since it contains confidential information. Based on the information in the document, the company's economic and social committee (Comité économique et social) can assess the risks, but this does not lead to development of a formal RA document. Instead, the committee is able to identify possible risks and make recommendations on how these could be addressed. BDESE gives the committee access to a lot of data they did not have before, and this information helps to understand more about the employees' problems. 'For instance, if an employee is on sick leave for three months, we know that there is a problem. Thanks to the document, it is easier to identify employees' issues.'

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*If you have a free software but it's not intuitive, user-friendly, and is not compatible with software you already use for other tasks, it's not worth it.*

**Director, mining industry**

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Other companies also seemed to understand RA as something that is not entirely a preventive and systematic approach but more a way to react and respond to a situation or accident. In one company, this was the case when harassment was reported. It took the company several months to gather the relevant data. However, by contrast, several respondents reported having implemented systematic RA approaches and appreciated their value. Only one respondent (cleaning services), while having a systematic RA approach in place, did not see the value of it. He observed that OSH is too time-consuming and administration heavy. He said that it takes him several weeks and he described it as 'hell' since he felt like he needs to start from scratch every time. He considered this to be too much work for little impact, with no return on investment. He felt that his actions in terms of carrying out an RA were not appreciated and did not prevent accidents and incidents. For example, this interviewee highlighted that when public authorities or customers tell the company that they should have put measures in place to prevent something from happening, that such measures were put in place but with no concrete/evident reduction of the risk.

**Companies reporting Excel sheets as their primary RA tool have largely developed them internally but sometimes with external assistance.** In one case, the director developed a document based on conversations with all her employees when the DUP (*rapport développement durable*) became obligatory in 2018. The director developed the tool based on training and tools given to her by the national federation of social centres (Fédération des Centres Sociaux de France). The training was dedicated to directors of social centres and focused on how to identify professional risks, and it included information about available tools to do so.

Another company received support from Médecine du Travail to design an RA Excel table. Médecine du Travail also comes to visit the company annually to identify risks that the internal team may not have identified and improve/complete the table if needed. In the company, there are different categories of offices (e.g., individual, group, remote working), and for each type, the same grid was adjusted with different risks. For each risk, the company provides an evaluation of what has been done and what

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<sup>27</sup> Employers with at least 50 employees must provide the economic and social committee (CSE) or staff representatives with an economic, social and environmental database (BDESE). The BDESE gathers information on the main economic and social orientations of the company. See: <https://entreprendre.service-public.fr/vosdroits/F32193>. It includes mandatory information that varies according to the company's workforce.

remains to be done, along with invoices (e.g., buying new chairs, changing lighting). The interviewee reported that the company's RA is '100% based on this grid.'

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*In my opinion, this approach is better and much more reassuring than having to face chatbots, especially with issues around security. Nowadays, we lack a human dimension because of the generalisation of online meetings.*

**Head of accounting and HR, legal sector**

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The support is received free of charge (as it is covered through the contributions the company pays for Médecine du Travail), and it includes consultations with an ergo-therapist as well. According to the interviewee, Médecine du Travail's contributions are essential since they know how to spot risks that belong to different categories (including, for example, psychosocial risks). They help the internal RA team to identify and implement relevant solutions. The RA document is updated every year and made available to all employees.

A company in personal care services relies on the support of a training institute. While an external RA institute is involved, it is the manager who completes the RA grid and produces the DUER. The document pays special attention to manual handling of loads and other risks leading to musculoskeletal disorders, which are considered to be the main risk. The DUER and the training programme are updated annually, and as a result a training on ergonomic postures and movements is offered regularly.

In the case of a company that stated that the RA requires advanced knowledge that is not available in the company, this company relies on the services of external auditors and consultants, combined with the work of in-house laboratories located within the headquarters of the company. RA encompasses various aspects related to the company's activity, which centres on recycling and crushing materials. These activities cause a range of problems (e.g., noise, dust, the need to check asbestos levels), which affect not only employees but also the environment in which the company operates. Several types of documents related to RA are produced: studies on noise, dust and pollution are carried out once a year for each site to check these comply with regulations; and studies also check the impact of these activities on employees. All these elements are synthesised in a sustainability report (*DUP*).

### **2.3.1 What motivates companies to carry out RAs?**

**The predominant motivation for carrying out an RA that was highlighted in the interviews is fulfilling legal requirements.** Companies report that this is especially important in the event of a labour inspection by Ursaff.

While in some cases the main motivation to begin to carry out an RA was the introduction of a legal obligation to do so, the management recognised over time that RA is also beneficial for employees.

**Overall, the need to care for the health, safety and wellbeing of the employees was also emphasised.** For the company conducting high-risk operations (e.g., recycling of construction materials), the issue of RA is a matter of **protecting employees**. This issue is equally important for businesses in which employees carry out strenuous physical work (such as cleaning). Here, the importance of preventing physical risks and resulting injuries was especially highlighted.

A business case for RA was not made strongly in this sample. However, one company highlighted the reputation and branding value of adequate RA. This company was keen to show public authorities that although its activities cause pollution, this pollution can be and indeed is controlled.

### 2.3.2 How do the companies find information about OSH and RA approaches?

The Internet and public authorities (the Médecine du Travail and Travail et Sécurité that disseminate information about new OSH legislation) are the two key sources of information mentioned by companies that opt for more traditional approaches to RA. While it is acknowledged that the Internet is full of sources, some respondents report difficulties in accessing relevant information, with some admitting that they feel that they do not know enough about available RA options.

One respondent explicitly blamed public authorities for lack of adequate information and guidance, stating that ‘they don’t do their job well’ in this regard. In his view, the labour inspection authority (inspection du travail – DREETS), should guide and advise the companies about RAs rather than only sanction for insufficient actions.

One company observed that the Excel spreadsheet they use is very complex and that they would need to buy a dedicated RA software to replace it but they knew this is very expensive. They also felt that they need software that is dedicated exclusively to RA, rather than one covering various aspects of company management, such as finances, but felt that the market offers mostly those.

### 2.3.3 What they appreciate in their tools/approaches

There is a general sentiment of appreciation in terms of the support received from external consultants and the value that they bring to the RA process.

**Relying on external service providers/OSH consultants brings in a sense of objective verification and certainty.** A company benefiting from the services of Médecine du Travail appreciated that they ‘are at the heart of the matter’ and know how to spot risks that belong to different categories (for example, psychosocial risks). They help the internal RA team to identify and implement relevant solutions. The issue of distance and objectivity is important as, for example, representatives of a company from a legal sector found it very difficult to evaluate risks since it is ‘subjective, at least when [they do] it [internally].’ She argued that Médecine du Travail brings an important perspective and thus can provide a lot of help.

**The need for inputs from experts specialising in OSH and RA plays a role and lends the completed RA reports legitimacy and a certainty that all important elements are covered in a timely manner.** One company stated that RA involves a high number of responsibilities. Thus, they felt the need to have an outsider’s view and employed an external consultant. They were afraid they might not meet the adequate standards or miss some things otherwise. The interviewee explained that it was reassuring to have the ‘objective view’ of someone whose job it is to carry out specifically RAs. A specific RA tool (Excel sheet) was recommended to them by the external provider and after seeing how serious and good quality it was, they decided to go with it. They update it regularly now. According to the interviewee, their RA tool is ‘just a calendar with dates.’ The information is then forwarded to the external provider who evaluates what has been done and what should be worked on.

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*The company has always worked with these external providers to ensure a neutral, impartial opinion.*

**Manager, construction sector (recycling)**

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**Good understanding of the line of work and tailoring approaches is valued.** One company appreciated that the visits from the public service providers include doctors, technicians and ergonomists. Others highlighted how tailored the external providers’ approach is to his company’s activity, as the institute involved in their RA is specialised in personal care services.

**Collaborating with external OSH providers for RA, according to one respondent, also has the benefit of structuring the process so that deadlines are met.** Having an external expert dealing with RA forces the company to remember what needs to be done, in a systematic way, annually. This ensures more rigorous legal compliance.

The importance of human contact, face-to-face meetings, and verification of the risks on site was also cited by several interviewees.

#### ***2.3.4 What would they change or improve in their approach?***

While there were no negative comments about the approach in terms of relying on external support, several respondents highlighted the shortcomings of carrying out RAs using Excel spreadsheets. This is considered to be rather time-consuming: one company reported that the first year it took them two weeks to complete the grid. Over the years, they have reduced the time needed and now it is on average five days to carry out the annual RA. The final document has 14 pages. Each year, after updating the document, the director prints it and makes it available to all employees.

The issue of **simplicity and time efficiency** was highlighted in several interviews. One respondent explained that **efficiency** would be the decisive factor in terms of considering other tools and approaches. Indeed, he noted that if an online tool proves more efficient for the organisation and for the employees than the tool they are using currently, they would consider switching to an online tool. He also acknowledged that price could make a big difference and influence the top management's decision. The interviewee said that their current approach was 'not so difficult' but that it required consistency and so they really needed to set themselves clear deadlines. He argued that a 'clearer and better explained' tool would be easier to teach/show to his employees if he needs to delegate the RA process. He also specified that he would be more interested in a tool that permits an assessment of psychosocial risks. Another respondent, with the company generally satisfied with their current RA approach, commented that while comprehensive, the Excel spreadsheet in use was rather complex, not user-friendly, and that a simpler grid would be useful.

#### ***2.3.5 How are the employees involved?***

Employees are involved in RA in various forms. In one company, this means filling out daily reports, while elsewhere that is understood simply as freedom to report to management any issues concerning health and safety. In others, specific departments are tasked with gathering information from employees.

One company in the construction sector had a unit that reported feedback from employees to higher-level management and any concerns can be raised through this mechanism. The interviewee explained that any issue or concern raised by employees is taken seriously and immediately addressed (at least through further investigation) to ensure that employees feel well taken care of. Other approaches are more targeted to obtaining employee feedback on specific matters. For example, there are issues with noise as the company's activities involve machines that crush rocks/stones. Employees were consulted when the company introduced ear plugs. For dust, the company introduced protective masks and employees were consulted about this decision so that a tailored solution could be offered. According to the interviewee, employees are generally interested in RA and they support it.

Some companies find it difficult to raise employees' awareness of OSH rules and safety measures and they highlight that compliance can be a challenge. One example included fire doors, which employees keep open to ventilate the rooms. Addressing this issue required the organisation of additional awareness sessions and the carrying out of internal evaluations every two months to check that the system is in order.

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*It takes time because we need to evaluate [the risks] by sector, by activity, by task. Often, the employees have a hard time stepping back and engaging in it. It requires analysing in depth every risk and potential prevention measures. Once we identify a risk, we need to dig into it, and we don't necessarily have the competencies to do this. The analysis takes an enormous amount of time.*

**Director, socio-cultural projects**

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Another respondent recalled how the company tried to involve representatives from the company's social committee in conducting RA but that there was little interest. He also anticipated that when the management tries to bring up the topic of OSH at the upcoming staff meeting, it again will not be met with enthusiasm. The respondent explained that this dynamic is partially due to the fact that his role as a manager means that his safety recommendations are often not welcomed by employees. According to him, employees perceive his OSH recommendations as something that he does solely out of his own interest, rather than for them.

**Lack of interest was reported not only regarding RA but also implementation of measures such as training.** As one respondent commented, employees are asked to put in writing their refusal to participate in available training. According to this interviewee this is largely because 'the people in ministries and prefectures are disconnected from reality', not aware of the employees' attitudes and take unjustified/unnecessary decisions towards the companies.

One negative impact of COVID-19 measures on employee involvement in RA was also observed by one respondent, who said that employees participate to a lesser extent in the process since they are often teleworking and spend less time in the office.

Interestingly, a company relying on support from Médecine du Travail (including visits to the office) and that had a comparatively sophisticated approach to RA did not consider active participation from employees. While it was understood from the interview that employees were consulted during the visits, when asked explicitly about their involvement in RA, the company's representative commented that employees most likely do not even know what an RA is.

Two companies mentioned financial incentives as a means of encouraging employees to get engaged in measures regarding OSH. One offered a 50 EUR monthly bonus to those who volunteer to be a fire safety manager, and another reported that every employee actively taking part in the RA receives a financial bonus. It must be highlighted here, however, that these companies might have a slightly different understanding of what an RA is (limiting it, for example, to fire safety and first aid; see section 2.3).

### **2.3.6 How do they assess the impact of RA?**

Overall, the respondents reported a positive impact as a result of carrying out RAs on OSH in their companies. For the most part, enterprises consider the risks identified and try to follow up and implement respective measures. In one company these include expanding fire safety infrastructure or providing each unit with a telephone to ensure better communication. The interviewee noted that security was improved in the company following those measures.

Another stated that measures were implemented in 90% of cases and he is sure that they improved OSH, even if some measures were not appreciated by the employees. Even if, for example, employees did not appear to care too much about certain risks, such as dust, the company knew that they would

be sanctioned by public authorities if they did not deal with them. However, some measures were put in place that turned out to bother employees, such as ear plugs.

One entirely office-based company bought new ergonomic chairs after the RA revealed that some employees had problems with their backs and changed the position of screens, all of which was taken into account in their DUER.

Another respondent commented on the challenges, stating that while some measures were implemented, they could always improve and implement further measures. For this to happen, however, the company would need the budget, time, and active involvement of employees, which it did not currently have. He also noticed that there seems to be a 'placebo effect' whereby people change their behaviour for a few months after being told about OSH, but that this effect ultimately fades away. He hoped and believed that RA helps, however. While he observed that some things have improved, the rate of occupational accidents remains too high in his company. Further, he believed that employees' health overall has not improved, and a lot still needs to be done.

### **2.3.7 Would they be interested in OiRA?**

Very few respondents had heard about OiRA prior to being contacted for this study. One heard about OiRA from their accounting services but was under the impression that the tool was not explicitly dedicated to OSH, and that instead it was like other general management software. He was also not aware that it was free of charge. After a short presentation of the tool's main features by the interviewers, several respondents indicated that they would be interested in testing it.

**Among the respondents potentially interested in testing OiRA, the argument of its legitimacy was highlighted as a positive attribute. The fact that the tools are developed by INRS makes OiRA trustworthy.**

Another aspect that motivated several companies to test OiRA in the future is the fact it is **free of charge**.

The promise of an **intuitive and time-efficient tool raised interest** — one respondent stated that the main motivation for him to switch to an online tool such as OiRA is saving time and simplicity of use. The added value of OiRA for him would be that processing data would be made clearer and more 'dynamic', especially since these data often have to be presented to external stakeholders later.

**Among the doubts and concerns regarding possible use of OiRA, a lack of adequate tailoring and personalisation prevails.** There is a fear that OiRA might be too generic and not capture the various tasks and physical circumstances of individual companies.

**Not finding an OiRA specific to a company's line of work is obviously a drawback.** One respondent, while initially interested in exploring OiRA, stated that there was no tool specific to their line of work (animal shelter). The closest was veterinary but this does not capture fully the different tasks performed at the shelter, and therefore their interest in OiRA decreased. Another respondent mirrored this sentiment, stating that he would not be interested in using OiRA if the tool was not adapted to the company's sector. One respondent specifically mentioned that they would be interested in a tool that permits an **assessment of psychosocial risks**.

**The fear of lack of personalisation in the online tool was another concern.** A respondent representing strictly office-based work commented that she was 'disturbed by the "sector specific" argument because each office is different.' She feared that OiRA may offer 'less customised solutions', whereas their approach (support from Médecine du Travail) is 'much more personalised' because there are two people who travel to the office and check the environment. Staff from Médecine du Travail are the ones who see the employees and can provide a whole lot of examples to complement the Excel table so that it is 'as fair and realistic as possible.' Additionally, the ergo-therapist knows the office, which guarantees individualised support.

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*I don't know if there is a possibility with OiRA for people to intervene in the office and observe the office's configuration, which would be not bad but otherwise, I don't see the point in visiting this platform especially since we already have a very personalised/customised approach with the Médecine du Travail who sees every employee.*

**Head of accounting and HR, legal sector**

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**Overall reluctance to the idea of using an online tool surfaced, especially if it did not seem to be sufficiently tailored.** Some respondents opposed the idea of using online tools, explaining that the use of offline approaches was a matter of habit and that there was a need to have tools that are flexible and tailored to their specific area of operation. One company preferred to use tools that have been designed by people in the sector, to be able to make comparisons to how OSH is implemented in other companies in the same sector. There was a fear that using tools not designed by people in the field would lead to misinterpretation of the processes and risks. Such concerns surfaced especially among the companies that have well-established RA approaches and have been implementing them for many years. Companies in which current approaches have been used for relatively short periods of time appeared to be more open to testing new solutions. It was acknowledged by some that OiRA or another online tool may be a beneficial tool for companies starting RA from scratch.

### 3 Comparative findings

In this chapter of the report, we present a comparative analysis of the findings established in the three groups of companies interviewed. The purpose of this segment is to understand how some motivations, challenges and approaches play out across the entire study sample (including companies using OiRA, those using other software, and enterprises opting for ‘traditional’ approaches such as Excel spreadsheets/external support). Where specific differences between the groups are evident, these are highlighted. The section needs to be read with caution, keeping in mind that the purpose of the study is to gain in-depth understanding of the practices, rather than offering generalisations based on a small sample from a qualitative study. In addition, the study sample only included companies actually conducting RAs, while available ESENER data shows that a high percentage of companies in France do not carry out regular OSH RAs (43.1%).<sup>28</sup> This section is structured following the initial research framework set out for the study, aimed at providing answers to the key research questions.

#### 3.1 What motivates/triggers SMEs to carry out RA and opt for a specific RA approach?

The three groups share similar if not the same reasons and motivations for carrying out RAs, yet the emphasis can vary. For the OiRA users, the **need to comply with the legal obligation in the area of OSH** (completing annual RA, 10) and the desire to **ensure safety, health, and wellbeing of the employees (nine) stand out**. Further, companies reported the need to reduce and avoid accidents at work (four), which is also highlighted from the perspective of ensuring productivity at the company, reducing levels of absence, and the financial savings resulting from avoiding accidents (which are costly to the companies). The need to foster a culture of OSH compliance also surfaced. This is very similar to companies opting for offline approaches; they also highlight first and foremost **fulfilling legal requirements, followed by the need to care for the health, safety, and wellbeing of the employees**. **Interestingly, the order is different for companies using online tools other than OiRA**. Here, the primary reason is to **avoid accidents and ensure safety of the employees**. The legal obligation to carry out an RA, while acknowledged, does not occupy a primary place.

When it comes to selecting specific RA approaches/tools, several aspects are taken into consideration. These can be broadly categorised as:

- issues related to functionality (reflecting the needs of a company);
- issues related to legitimacy; and
- issues related to the availability of external support.

**These three aspects play out differently among the three categories.**

**In terms of functionality**, all companies report having several essential elements they look for/appreciate in their selected approaches. These include a simple, **intuitive, and user-friendly set-up** (highlighted mostly by the OiRA users in the sample), availability of a **well-rounded RA approach canvas** (again, important for the OiRA users), and being **integrated into the company’s overall management software** (largely represented in the group using other online approaches). The latter goes hand-in-hand with multiple functionalities such as a direct connection to the HR segments of the tool or the financial department.

**Price was not highlighted significantly within the study sample**, although users of other online tools mentioned some of them as being costly, however this did not stop them from purchasing them. Among the OiRA users, when asked if they would recommend OiRA to others, some reflected on the added value of the fact that the tool is free.

<sup>28</sup> EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *ESENER 2019, Country profile: France*, 2019. Available at: [https://visualisation.osha.europa.eu/esener/en/survey/detailpage-national-bar-chart/2019/osh-management/en\\_1/E3Q250/company-size/FR](https://visualisation.osha.europa.eu/esener/en/survey/detailpage-national-bar-chart/2019/osh-management/en_1/E3Q250/company-size/FR)

Being **adapted to a company's needs and circumstances** is considered one of the key elements for selecting and continuing with approaches to RA. However, this means different things for different groups. Some feel this need is fulfilled by OiRA, through the fact that it is sector specific, while others remain faithful to relying on external support since this comes from services familiar with their line of work. The companies opting for industry-specific online tools other than OiRA do so as they feel that these are very well adjusted to their work, needs and risks. Equally, data collected through the interviews suggest that the companies more advanced in RA (for instance, those that have been carrying out RAs for longer) look for more advanced tools with more detailed information and features.

**The issue of legitimacy can be approached in two ways.** On the one hand, there is the legitimacy of the tool/approach considered, as highlighted in the OiRA group, which comes from the fact that **public authorities are the authors/developers of the tools**. INRS is particularly involved in this regard. Legitimacy also results from **recommendations from OSH experts** such as occupational medicine services or **business partners and colleagues** who have tested the tool and recommend it based on their experience. All these **different forms of endorsement are important and listed as factors that contributed to the selection of OiRA as a tool of choice**. There is a sense that backing from the public authorities guarantees the tool is adjusted to the current policy and legal framework, giving security that using it will allow the company to fulfil its obligations.

On the other hand, there is the question of objectivity and legitimacy of the RA results. This aspect is highlighted largely by companies using external services to carry out or verify their RAs. In the case of a company in construction, carrying out an RA requires specialist tests (on noise and pollution, for instance) and these are partially carried out in-house but also need to be outsourced. However, even in cases of companies with less pertinent risks (based exclusively on office work), the sense of authority that comes from involving external experts to carry out or verify RA is paramount.

Lastly, **availability of support**, where available, is a strong factor in terms of supporting the selection and continuation of certain approaches. This support takes the form of on-site visits by external OSH experts (public services, OSH service providers) or help in developing Excel grids. Equally, within the group of companies using other software solutions, support to set up and operate the software was highlighted as important. For the OiRA group, the available support from INRS was highlighted as a significant factor.

**Interestingly, the interviews with the companies did not reveal any significant importance of sectoral initiatives in terms of the selection of specific approaches across the three groups.** This can be seen among other things from the sources of information about OSH in general, and ways in which companies learnt about their respective tools. The list includes general public authorities (INRS, Amélie, Ursaff), occupational medicine and other OSH specialists). Only companies from the construction industry and an optician refer explicitly to sector specific sources.

In the case of two companies, trade unions and sectoral organisations played a role in fostering certain approaches, but on an internal basis such as supporting development of Excel grids in one and involvement in development of OiRA in the other.

The sector in which a company operates is key when looking into the extent to which a specific tool is tailored to the needs of a company. These needs are to some extent reported as being fully met by OiRA, while other companies prefer the support of external OSH services as these are experts with hands-on experience in the sector. Lastly, in the case of OiRA specifically, the fact that the tool is recommended by business partners and colleagues' points to the potential importance of sectoral connections.

### 3.2 What barriers are faced by MSEs in systematic RA?

The study points to several challenges faced by companies when carrying out a systematic RA, although not all have been explicitly noted as such by the respondents. It needs to be noted that within the study sample all, but one company carry out systematic RAs. While some companies report having so far

carried out only one RA using OiRA, they largely indicated willingness to make this a regular activity. Two very small companies reported that they are not sure whether they will repeat the RA (using OiRA or another tool), based on the false assumption that they are not legally obliged to do so.

In terms of carrying out the assessment itself, challenges highlighted in the interviews include a lack of time. This is particularly evident when companies discuss using the Excel spreadsheet approach, described as **time-consuming**, and this has been one of the reasons for companies to switch to using OiRA.

Another challenge is **insufficient information about available tools, resources, and solutions**. Further, some companies cited the lack of solutions proposed or the lack of suitable solutions to their current needs or business profile. While the companies listed numerous sources of information about OSH, including the Internet, dedicated journals, newsletters and — importantly — OSH experts, a sense of lack of trustworthy, exhaustive knowledge of the topic surfaces from several interviews. On the one hand, companies know that they need to read up a lot on different sources, but on the other hand several reported they did not feel that they had enough information on how to select the best approach to RA. One respondent highlighted his wish for a more supportive and consultative role of labour inspectors in this regard.

While interviews with the company representatives did not point to **a low level of understanding of OSH issues** as one of the obstacles, interviews with the OSH experts supporting companies in their RA indicated this. This was especially apparent in the case of the maritime sector, where small companies did not have a good grasp of the regulative framework and required substantial support.<sup>29</sup> This does not mean there is low interest in the safety of employees, but rather that translating these concerns into the language of RA is problematic and companies require substantial assistance, at least during the initial stages. They equally reported not to have the time necessary to complete RAs. As a result, they tend to finalise RAs with no risks listed. The companies are reported to reach out to OSH services urgently and in an ad hoc manner, when realising that in order to obtain a shipping permit, they are obliged to carry out an RA.

More prominent differences surface in relation to understanding the essence of RA specifically, rather than OSH generally. Here, it is evident that companies using OiRA stand out as having a clear grasp of the purpose and elements of RA (set out within the OiRA framework). There are companies in the two other groups pointing to a somewhat mixed and blurred understanding of what RA is. This limited understanding of RA was especially prevalent across the group using a traditional approach to RA. Some see it as integrated into the larger business RA process (looking at delays in projects, financial risks, etc.), while others refer to the collection of aggregated data about issues such as sick leave. Lastly, one company using an offline approach referred almost specifically to fire drills and fire safety as Ras, while others placed a strong emphasis on training as the key element of RA. Against these practices, the group of companies using OiRA offers the most coherent and adequate understanding of RA. It can be assumed that since for many of these companies OiRA is the first tool and their first systematic RA experience, their high level of understanding of the RA process and follow-up stems from their learning experience with OiRA. For those switching to OiRA from dedicated Excel tables, the basic knowledge might have been there previously, yet it seems to have been further expanded by OiRA. For example, they point to discovering new aspects of OSH due to the tool.

**A lack of employee involvement in OSH** and related challenges in terms of **raising awareness of OSH among employees** was cited by several of interviewees across the three groups. To this end, the issue of perceiving OSH as something that is carried out by managers for the good of the business rather than for employees was mentioned both by a representative of a company using an online tool and one relying on Excel/external consultants. There was a view that limited involvement of employees leads to limited ownership of the RA process and limits the information available to conduct an RA properly. If employees are not invited to contribute on the basis of their workplace knowledge and/or do not feel motivated to implement and adhere to the measures in place, OSH in the company cannot be implemented to the highest standards. By contrast, many OiRA respondents highlighted how the use of the tool enabled employee involvement in the RA that had not been possible before. Others mentioned that involvement has increased and improved significantly with the use of OiRA.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with an employee of Institut Maritime de Prévention (IMP), on file with the report authors.

**In terms of implementation of the measures and action plans**, two obstacles were identified across the three groups equally. One is a lack of resources for carrying out specific actions (such as renovation works), and the other is insufficient practical and tailored guidance for how certain measures should be implemented. While larger companies often have staff dedicated to OSH, explicitly tasked with RAs, OiRA is targeted at and mostly used by smaller companies. Specific posts dedicated to OSH are not possible in MSEs, where carrying out the RA is mostly the responsibility of managers or employees, who are often not well equipped for the task.

Digitalisation and an increasing offer of online RA tools might have made the RA process easier. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact insofar as it transformed the way in which some companies were operating, prompting the need to consider new risks (remote or hybrid work, for instance). It might also have highlighted some risks that were not so prominent previously, including psychosocial aspects. On the one hand, the pandemic made monitoring of risks more difficult and in some cases reduced involvement of the employees. On the other hand, some companies were able to take advantage of the increase in online solutions as a result of the pandemic and the broader perspective that it gave them on OSH and on the RA process. In this respect, OiRA users, compared to the other two groups, seem to have carried out more structured work on including COVID-19-related risks in their RAs.

**Interestingly, opting for OiRA could be a key strategy used by the companies to address several challenges.** For those with no previous systematic RA approaches in place, the tool provided a ready-to-use, trustworthy canvas. It helped tackle the multifaceted RA process through a structure, helping companies organise the process and leading them up to the action plan, which was something not all of them had envisaged at the outset. It addressed the issue of reliability and the need to obey the law through the fact that it is endorsed by key public stakeholders.

For those who had carried out RA in the past by using Excel spreadsheets and paper-based solutions, OiRA helped to streamline the process, making it more efficient, user-friendly, and involving employees to a great extent, which is a key aspect of a successful risk management process.

### 3.3 What support would companies need?

The issue of support surfaced both through the interviews with the company representatives across all three groups as well as in the conversations with the OSH experts. According to one of the OSH experts/intermediaries interviewed, what is missing with the OiRA software 'is really **personalised support** for people. For many company managers, the DUER did not exist during their apprenticeship. Often, they find it difficult to understand the purpose. While it is well explained in the software, it still takes some time to get used to it.' In the view of this interviewee, systematic personal support in all sectors of activity would make a big difference in the approach to RA. The issue of receiving personalised support was brought up by other interviewees from the three groups. While those using commercial software often appreciated the hotline or support services that come with the software, those opting for offline approaches had often involved external services and appreciated their support. OiRA users sometimes mentioned the possibility of added value if there had been a support scheme in place (in the form of a hotline or similar). However, something that had not been considered by the interviewees was the cost of free support. For the OiRA group it is not clear from the interviews whether they would be willing to pay extra to receive such consultancy services, since many of them especially appreciated the fact that the software came at no cost for the company.

What companies are looking for in a software:

- Being updated with the current OSH regulations
- Coming with the support of a consultant
- Maximum tailoring to the company's circumstances and needs
- Fun and engaging layout
- Endorsement of public authorities
- Simplicity and time efficiency
- Integration into other software used by the company

Finally, it is worth mentioning here that there is a new feature under development that will enable OiRA users to give access to their RA document for an external

service. The external service will then be able to 'validate' the RA and as such close the document for further editing.

The issue of **possibly limited digital literacy** was also raised, especially on the part of the small companies in this study. There was a sense that at least during the initial steps with OiRA, dedicated support is beneficial. The tutorials and brochures available were appreciated. Generally, however, the fact that OiRA can be easily carried out by the companies alone and without external support was considered as huge added value and most respondents highlighted that the software is user-friendly, and it only took a short time for them to get acquainted with it on their own. This also seemed to be in contrast to the commercial tools, some of which seemed to be so complicated that extensive training was needed to be able to use them.

While not explicitly requested by the respondents, the data collected suggest that support in involving employees in a more structured and effective way in the RA process could be beneficial. Here again, differences could be observed between the three groups. While the commercial software approaches often did have a predefined approach involving employees via regular online questionnaires and similar, the group using offline tools often reported that employees were not involved actively in the RA process. In some cases, they were however informed about the final results. The OiRA group again mentioned how the software and the new structured approach helped them to take a more comprehensive approach to involving employees in different ways. This came as a surprise, since the OiRA tools highlight the importance of employee involvement but do not (yet) present a feature to do so actively. However, it is important to know that such a multiuser feature, enabling the account holder to give others access to the RA, is currently under development.

### 3.4 How does using OiRA compare to other tools/approaches if used by the company?

Only one company in the sample reported shifting from OiRA to another tool. While the company still highly recommended OiRA as a good tool for RA, it felt that it needed a more comprehensive and tailored tool, and therefore transitioned to a different tool. Overall, looking at the three groups, the OiRA results seem to point to a chronological development of approaches to RA. Companies not doing anything at all in terms of RA were not included, although the study revealed that some companies using 'traditional' offline approaches such as Excel tables sometimes lacked understanding of RA, limiting it to certain areas such as training or the analysis of sick leave data from employees. At the same time, the OiRA group highlighted in several cases how the tools had amplified their view on RA and made them aware of new aspects to integrate into their RA. Finally, the third group seemed to have more resources and prioritised linking the RA to other processes in the company such as HR or similar. Mostly they seemed to be high performers regarding OSH, integrating this in a holistic way across all their business processes and often also having clear needs/requirements from clients and/or authorities (e.g., construction sites, waste recycling, etc.).

These results are in line with the main idea behind OiRA, to provide an easy-to-use tool that helps small companies to better understand OSH and the RA process and embark on the journey of great OSH performance.

Among the companies that may stop using OiRA were two that assumed that they are not legally required to carry out RAs. In their case, if the motivation to carry out an RA is not strong enough, they will not continue with OiRA, even if generally they report good experiences with the tool.

## 4 Conclusions and key pointers

Companies in the sample strived to look after their employees, ensuring their safety and health, which is not surprising since the sample only included companies that were active with regard to OSH and RA. However, it is clear from the selection criteria (only including companies that report that they carry out RAs) that the study does not give a representative view on how MSEs deal with OSH and RAs. Other research shows that overall companies of different sizes in France do not have a systematic approach to prevention and RAs, and that this is even more challenging for MSEs — which is not inconsequential as the two million MSEs operating in France are the employers of half of the private sector workforce<sup>30</sup>. While legislation and regulation may help in terms of RA, the role of management and of employee participation is key. However, low levels of awareness and scarcity of a wide range of resources may undermine the often complex and time-consuming process of completing RAs<sup>31</sup>.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the report. First of all, it is encouraging to see companies being eloquent about what they appreciate and what they need in terms of their RA approaches. This applies to all the categories investigated, small and larger companies alike. Being able to hear the respondents' opinions and ideas makes further adjustments of approaches and tools easier. Secondly, it is valuable to see that companies report that they see added value of RA and their impact on overall OSH at the workplace. While these inputs are based on perceptions (with some providing very explicit examples of new elements of OSH that they had considered, thanks to their RA), such information is useful to maintain motivation, commitment and further build the case for RA.

While not surprisingly the legal obligation to carry out systematic RAs surfaces as one of the key motivations for embarking on the process, there are differences in the priorities of the three groups (see section 3.1).

At the same time, it needs to be noted that several of the companies listed as OiRA users reported no other systematic approaches prior to using the tool. It can therefore be understood that, in fact, OiRA reaches the target group for which it was created and provides an easy start with regard to RA to those who were not previously engaged in the topic. Thus, **a clear and undisputed conclusion from the study is that the tool makes a difference**. As pointed out above, many of the companies using OiRA either did not have any systematic RA in place previously or they had time-consuming, inefficient Excel spreadsheets and paper-based tools. As such, it can be argued that OiRA paved the way for many companies to embark on, and hopefully stay on, a long-term sustainable RA path. OiRA is judged by the companies as easy to use and intuitive. It can be used by companies on their own and it is reported to be making a difference.

The report shows several areas in which OiRA could be improved, and some, as it is usual with this kind of research, contradictory. All of them however seem to be minor, with none dramatically altering the general concept. It is somehow encouraging that what users want to improve is layout, colours, and emoticons, rather than the content or the overall concept/approach. Importantly, all the ideas for further improvement come from people generally satisfied with the use of the tool.

Overall, while OiRA can be used by various types of companies, the study reveals that it is best placed to support those that are just beginning their RA journey. This is a strength since the research shows that the majority of MSEs do not have any systematic RA in place, and OiRA was developed to target this specific group. The main aim is to help companies start RA. If this in the longer term leads to companies finding their own more sophisticated approach to RA, OiRA can be judged as having fulfilled its objective. However, the research also shows that many companies have in fact been successfully using OiRA for several years, including those with intensive and frequent RA.

<sup>30</sup> INRS (2017) OiRA- An INRS/EU-OSHA partnership for risk assessment for MSEs  
<https://en.inrs.fr/our-activities/assistance/oira.html>

<sup>31</sup> EU-OSHA (2018) The view from the workplace: Safety and Health in Micro and Small Enterprises in the EU.  
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/france-safety-and-health-micro-and-small-enterprises-eu-view-workplace>

Another aspect of OiRA is that it is highly appreciated as being helpful in engaging employees in the RA process. While the study did not point towards any specific functionality of the tool, there is a sense that OiRA-using companies in the sample are well prepared to engage employees. They report that the tool and its systematic approach has made this involvement easier compared to approaches taken previously.

It seems that companies willing to pay certain (often high) sums for their tools see clear reasons for doing so. The argument of firms wanting to have modules of their general management systems dedicated to OSH and integrated into the overall software architecture is a valid one, and OiRA has not been developed to take this place. On the contrary, OiRA has been created to reach those who do not know where to start.

Small enterprises very frequently express a need for support in terms of occupational risk prevention, because of their lack of internal competence in this area, and this has been largely confirmed in this study.<sup>32,33</sup> Companies within a study conducted by Amnyos/INRS<sup>34</sup> clearly favoured intermediaries rather than tools and preferably intermediaries specialised in risk prevention (50%), or at least in business consulting (23%).

Finally, it must be highlighted that these study results relate to research in France alone, while OiRA tools are available in a total of 17 European countries. While this research points to certain conclusions, all of them are based on the feedback from French users. More generalisations as well as differentiations will be possible by applying the same research approach to several other OiRA-using countries. While obviously the target group differs in terms of culture, OSH approaches and services available, the use of different concepts when developing the tools might play an important role in terms of the comprehensiveness of tools or the breakdown of sectoral information.

## 4.1 Key pointers

Considering the findings of the study, a set of recommendations has been developed, addressing mainly OiRA national partners in terms of how to best approach and support companies for better use of OiRA and generate ideas for the overall development of the tool.

### 4.1.1 On approaching companies and promoting OiRA

- OiRA should continue being advertised as a tool best suited to MSEs, especially those at the very beginning of their systematic RA processes. Highlighting the tool's user-friendliness, intuitive approach, and possibility to structure the RA process in a timesaving and sector specific manner helps to engage new companies.
- Promoting the fact that OiRA is developed and/or endorsed by national public authorities enhances the tool's legitimacy and appeal, seen as a guarantee of the quality and respectability of the software. This can be important especially in countries where multiple online RA tools are available, and companies may struggle to choose wisely. Equally, the fact that OiRA can serve as a proof of a conducted RA should be highlighted.
- Highlighting the fact that OiRA tools are developed in close collaboration with social and industry partners and as such reflect the circumstances of different sectors is key to promoting the tool as context specific. This enhances understanding that OiRA is not generic and may help companies to try OiRA.

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<sup>32</sup> Kornig, C., & Verdier, É. (2008). De très petites entreprises de la réparation automobile face aux normes publiques de la prévention des risques professionnels: Le cas d'une action collective territoriale. *Revue française des affaires sociales*, 161-184.

<sup>33</sup> Malenfer, M. (2014). Évaluer les risques professionnels dans les TPE: Les atouts du numérique: Petites entreprises: quelles solutions pour la prévention des risques? *Hygiène et sécurité du travail (Paris)*. 234, 27-31. <https://pascal-francis.inist.fr/vibad/index.php?action=getRecordDetail&idt=28364282>

<sup>34</sup> INRS. (2019). *Évaluation des différentes stratégies et actions de l'INRS vers les TPE/PME sur la période 2007-2017*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331374993\\_Evaluation\\_des\\_differentes\\_strategies\\_et\\_actions\\_de\\_l%27INRS\\_vers\\_les\\_TPEPME\\_sur\\_la\\_période\\_2007-2017](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331374993_Evaluation_des_differentes_strategies_et_actions_de_l%27INRS_vers_les_TPEPME_sur_la_période_2007-2017) (Accessed 25 January 2022)

- OiRA is highly recommended by its users and often reaches companies through word of mouth, personal suggestions, and a snowball effect. This is a clear asset and could be further capitalised on by actively encouraging users to spread the word among their contacts.
- Companies report learning about OSH overall, and RA approaches specifically, mostly online, and through dedicated government websites and magazines. These channels should be considered as a priority for further promotion of OiRA.
- Companies carry out Internet research to find information about OSH and RA. Making sure that OiRA information appears high on the results list of search engines can significantly help to promote it.
- OiRA is reported to mainstream OSH issues within companies, promote transparency and enhance engagement of employees. These aspects deserve highlighting, as some company representatives report low OSH awareness among employees as one of the barriers to improving OSH.
- The fact that OiRA proposes practical measures on how to follow up on the RA is highly valued by companies. The availability of an action plan within OiRA is a clear advantage and deserves highlighting as a practical way to structure further OSH work.
- A good balance in terms of tool content is advisable, and the French approach seems to have found such a balance. Comprehensiveness of information has to be clearly weighted against the time users need to invest to go through the tool. The fact that there is mixed feedback about the amount of information provided (some companies find it to be just right, others would like more or less information) indicates that most users might be satisfied with this middle way.
- In relation to this, aspects that allow the tool to be targeted to a company's needs (such as optional modules or profile questions, leading to certain aspects of the tool to be considered or not, based on the company's needs) seem to be appreciated by users and should be considered in all tool developments.
- Beyond the software itself, the study revealed the need and appreciation of direct external support in carrying out RAs (not only among the OiRA users but all the groups). Embedding this within the national OiRA framework could be considered, either through offering direct chat support on the OiRA website or linking OiRA with existing public OSH services. Exploring collaboration with private OSH services should also be considered, with the aim of providing better support to companies in effective RA.
- In terms of tool development, it may be advisable to follow a continuous approach and offer the first tool based on simple information and limited to a small number of risks and amount of information. When companies have reached a certain level of expertise in the RA process, a more advanced follow-up tool could be offered.

#### **4.1.2 On further developing the application**

- Since OiRA is a tool focused on supporting the engagement of employees in RA processes, it would be advisable to continue developing collaborative-oriented features of the software (enhancing possibilities to share, link and create multiple-account work).
- The issue of layout should be considered with care, as the study revealed mixed opinions regarding this matter. While some appreciate the clear and no-nonsense look, others prefer a more modern, engaging interface.
- The possibility to provide legal and regulatory updates through OiRA merits consideration, as this was cited as an important motivation for companies when they look for tools and information on RA.

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