

Risk assessment using OiRA at Cypriot workplaces – a qualitative study

National report

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List of abbreviations

List of abbreviations used in the report

DLI	Cypriot Department of Labour Inspection
ESYPP	Internal Protection and Prevention Service
EU	European Union
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
EXYPP	External Occupational Safety and Health Consultant
IT	Information technology
MLSI	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
MSEs	Micro and small enterprises
OiRA	Online interactive Risk Assessment
OSH	Occupational safety and health
RA	Risk assessment
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and rationale for the study

This report focuses exclusively on Cyprus as part of a broader pan European study on the effectiveness of the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) in workplaces. Building on insights from a qualitative study conducted in France in 2022 (EU-OSHA, 2023a), which highlighted OiRA's utility, flexibility and innovative applications by users, this study expanded its scope to include Cyprus, Slovenia and Lithuania — countries that, like France, have developed multiple OiRA tools.

The primary objective of this study was to contribute cross-country evidence on OiRA's functionality and understand how the tool operates and is used across diverse national and contextual settings.

The study aimed to deepen the understanding of how OiRA is used at country level, also compared to other risk assessment (RA) tools and in the broader context of national approaches to RA. It analysed how companies and occupational safety and health (OSH) experts approached RA, focusing on how OiRA facilitated and improved RA processes and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using OiRA. More importantly, the study examined how OiRA is used and what factors facilitate its adoption among establishments, providing insights into end users' experiences with this tool and other RA methodologies.

In this context, the study also included insights on Cyprus's approach to developing and promoting OiRA. It analysed the implications of national approaches to OiRA development and its use and practical application in workplaces. The study also explored the strategies for communicating and promoting OiRA to micro and small enterprises (MSEs) (as well as OSH experts), considering the diverse contexts in which the tools are used.

In summary, the study sought to provide insights that enhance the understanding and implementation of OiRA across different national contexts — in this report's case, Cyprus. Findings from the study aim to inform the overall perception of the implementation of RA processes in Cyprus and how and for what reasons particular methodologies and tools are chosen, with a specific focus on technical aspects and the utility of OiRA tools.

1.2 About OiRA

The OiRA application, launched by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) in 2011, aims to support stakeholders across EU Member States in developing user-friendly online RA tools tailored to national and sector-specific contexts. These tools are provided free of charge to MSEs, facilitating their use through an interactive online platform. Unlike traditional RA approaches focused on risks, OiRA tools are normally structured around tasks and activities typical of specific sectors, making them accessible even to users without RA expertise.

The OiRA process guides users through the full RA, including prioritising risks and formulating an action plan or documented RA. The OiRA generator is freely available to EU sectoral social dialogue partners and national authorities, enabling them to create sector-specific tools. These tools are designed to help MSEs, many of which may not have previously conducted an RA systematically, to initiate and implement structured RA processes.

2 The Cypriot OSH context

This chapter provides an overview of Cyprus' OSH landscape and how OiRA is situated in it. It gives general background information on how the system works and how OiRA supports the national approach. The information is further enriched by figures on the use of the OiRA tools in different sectors and user characteristics, as far as available.

2.1 Legal framework

In Cyprus, the government regulates policy on safety and health at work through the **Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance** (MLSI). The **Department of Labour Inspection** (DLI) proposes legislation to the MLSI after consulting social partners, and it is responsible for its enforcement (Charalambous, 2018).

The legal framework for OSH is based on a cluster of laws that were introduced since 1996. In the early 2000s, more regulations were introduced which aimed at transposing the EU Framework Directive (89/391/EEC) on safety and health at work (MLSI, 2023; EU-OSHA, 2022). This cluster of laws was amended by new legislation in 2020 and 2023. Collectively, the original laws and subsequent amendments are referred to as the **safety and health at work laws of 1996-2023**.¹ Since 2021, a set of regulations, referred to as the **management and safety at work regulations of 2021** complements these laws.² These regulations provide for the organisational and management measures that employers must have in place in order to address OSH.

The overall legal framework for OSH in Cyprus applies to both public and private organisations. According to this, **employers, irrespective of the size or economic sector of their organisation, as well as self-employed persons, are required to have in place a written RA**.³ The written assessment must report the sources of risks, the affected parties (e.g. different types of workers, visitors) and the existing measures in place to address these risks. In addition, it must include the additional measures that are to be taken to respond to these risks, and the persons responsible for implementing them. According to the Cypriot legislation, RAs must be reviewed in case there is a change or introduction of new working methods, processes, substances, facilities, premises or equipment, as well as in the event of a workplace accident, dangerous incident or occupational disease, and updated, if and as necessary (Council of Ministers, 2021).

2.2 Policy framework

In addition to the relevant legislation, Cyprus has multi-annual strategies related to safety and health at work. Typically, these span a seven-year period and define the direction and priorities of the country in the field of OSH, in line with the relevant priorities set at the EU level, for example in the EU's Strategic Frameworks on Health and Safety at work (MLSI, 2021).

At the national level, to prepare these multi-annual strategies, social dialogue takes place with the **Pancyprian Safety and Health Council**, which is a **tripartite body** advising the MLSI on new legislation and measures for the prevention of occupational accidents and I diseases. Among other parties, the Council includes the Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB), the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KEBE), the major confederations of trade unions (PEO, SEK, DEOK, POAS), the confederation of public servants (PASDYD), the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK), and the Cyprus Safety and Health Association (CYSHA) (EU-OSHA, 2022).

▪ Worker consultation

Cyprus's legal framework also provides the means for workers' consultation around safety and health issues. In particular, the legislation requires employers to designate in writing one or more of their workers to deal with safety and health issues at the workplace and consult them on these issues. These persons constitute a so-called **Internal Protection and Prevention Service (ESYPP)** (MLSI & DLI 2013, p.7).

In facilities where there are more than 10 workers, the legal framework also provides for the presence of a **safety committee**. The safety committee includes the **employer or its representative**, who is the president of the committee, a **representative** designated or elected by the workers, and, where applicable, a **safety and health officer** and a **physician**. The safety committee has a three-year term, and workers can serve indefinite terms. It meets at least once every three months or upon written request from its elected representative, or the employer. Among its responsibilities, **the committee** proposes to the employer measures with a view to improving safety and health at the workplace, reviews the RAs done by the safety and health officer (where they exist), and cooperates with the DLI during workplace inspections. **The representative** of the committee must take part in the committee's meetings, inform the employer about safety and health issues at the workplace, and accompany the labour inspector to

¹ DLI. Safety and Health at Work in Cyprus. Legislation:

<https://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dli/dliup.nsf/All/1F0F98BA16BA0DA4C2257DE10030EB6C?OpenDocument>

² DLI. Οι περί διαχείρισης θεμάτων ασφάλειας και υγείας στην εργασία κανονισμοί του 2021 [Management and safety at work regulations of 2021]: <https://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dli/dliup.nsf/All/21060B06AD2E039AC2257E03004124A5>

³ DLI. Αξιολόγηση Κινδύνου [Risk assessment]: https://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dli/dliup.nsf/pagerr_gr/pagerr_gr?OpenDocument

the workplace premises during an inspection. As Table 1 shows, the number of representatives increases based on the number of workers.

Table 1. Number of safety and health representatives

Number of workers	Number of safety and health representatives
3-9	1
10-19	2
20-49	3
For every 50 more workers	+1

Source: MLSI & DLI, 2013, p. 7

Employers with over 200 workers are further required to hire a full-time **safety and health officer** (MLSI & DLI 2013). Among their responsibilities, the safety and health officer participates in all the safety committees' activities, conducts workplace inspections, proposes recommendations, and, more broadly, has overall responsibility for all issues related to safety and health at the workplace.

Employers must make the necessary arrangements to set up **safety committees** and inform the DLI within a month of the election of its representatives. Additionally, employers, among their other responsibilities, must provide the committee members with the necessary time to get accustomed to their role during working hours without any effect on their pay.

If, using the provisions noted above, employers, including self-employed persons, cannot conduct a written RA, they can refer to **external consultants (EXYPP)**. External consultants are accredited by the Director of the Labour Inspectorate as such, after fulfilling a number of conditions, such as having a tertiary education degree on OSH, and passing the Inspectorate's written exams.⁴

3 OiRA in Cyprus

Cyprus was the first EU Member States to introduce the OiRA tools, as a means to offer to MSEs, which represent the overwhelming majority of enterprises in Cyprus (Statistical Service of Cyprus, 2022), an accessible and free-of-charge tool for RAs and improve their overall safety and health. At the time of writing, Cyprus had 11 tools, covering different sectors, from bakeries and butcher shops to cafes and guest houses. These tools are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. OiRA sectoral tools in Cyprus

Sector	Month of publishing	Year of publishing	Year of revision
Hairdressers	September	2011	2021
Office work	November	2012	2021
Catering	November	2014	2021
Butchers	September	2014	2020

⁴ DLI. Εξωτερικές υπηρεσίες πρόληψης και υγείας (ΕΞΥΠΠ) [External services for safety and health, EXYPP]: https://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dli/dliup.nsf/pager7_gr/pager7_gr?OpenDocument

Sector	Month of publishing	Year of publishing	Year of revision
Educational establishments	September	2016	N/A
Guest houses	November	2017	2021
Vehicles – car repair and varnishing	November	2017	2021
Cafes and restaurants	November	2017	2021
Shops	November	2017	2021
Bakeries	April	2020	N/A
COVID-19	June	2020	N/A

Source: EU-OSHA⁵

3.1 Main promotional approaches to OiRA⁶

This section presents how the DLI promoted the OiRA tools in the recent years, starting from 2020. These efforts were used to enhance a promotional support provided by EU-OSHA and launched in the same year. During that period, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, the DLI used several means to promote the OiRA tools (see Figure 1).⁷

Figure 1. OiRA tools promotional activities



To promote OiRA, the DLI worked together with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Cyprus's Workers Confederation (SEK), CYSHA, the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and the European University Cyprus, as well as the public transport enterprise, which agreed to feature OiRA as an advertisement in its buses. In addition to promoting OiRA through targeted efforts, it is also worth noting that word of mouth also played an important role in raising awareness around it, considering the small size of Cyprus.

More in-depth information on how OiRA is promoted in Cyprus is available online in the EU-OSHA case study (EU-OSHA, 2022).

⁵ EU-OSHA. OiRA tools: <https://oira.osha.europa.eu/en/oira-tools>

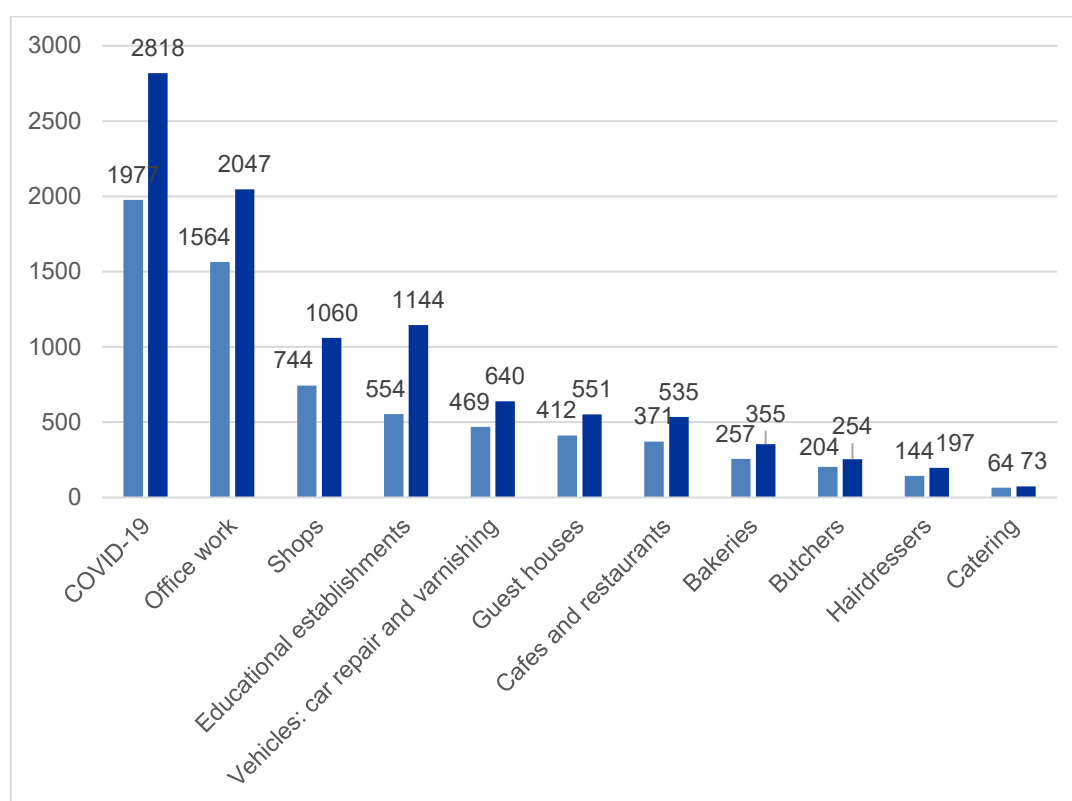
⁶ Information in this section is based on an interview with Cyprus's DLI and EU-OSHA (2023).

⁷ For a detailed account of the promotional activities, please refer to EU-OSHA (2023).

3.2 Use of OiRA tools⁸

As of September 2024, the OiRA tools in Cyprus had a total number of 6,791 users and they were used to perform 9,710 RAs. As Figure 2 shows, in the same period, the OiRA tool with the largest number of users was the COVID-19 tool (1,977 users), followed by the tools for office work (1,563), shops (744), educational establishments (544), car repair and varnishing (469), guest houses (371), and cafes and restaurants (371).

Figure 2. OiRA risk assessments in Cyprus



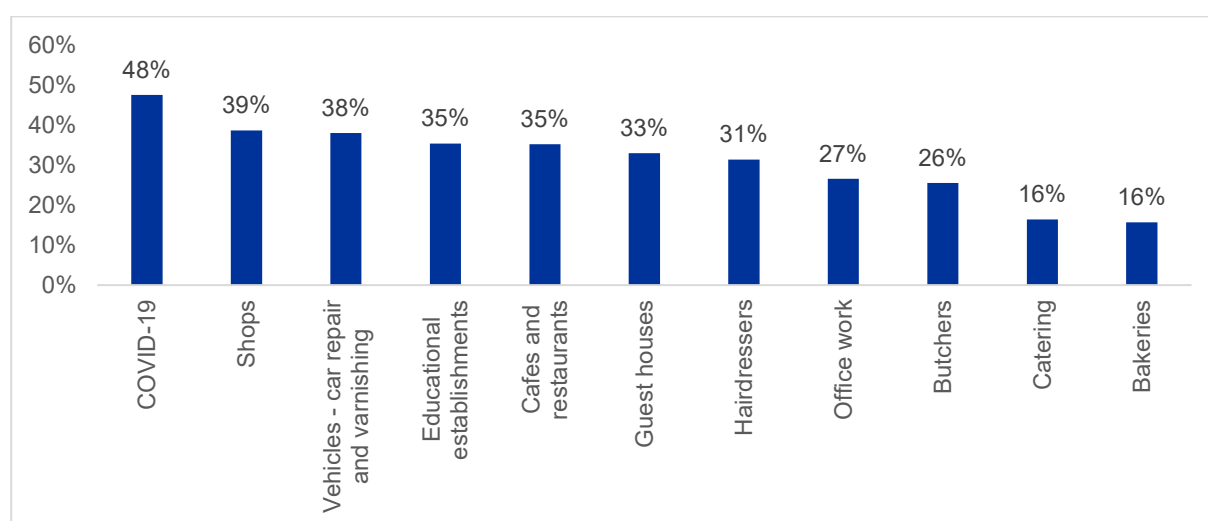
Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase⁹

Reviewing in more detail the process of RA reveals that the full potential of the OiRA tools might be untapped. In particular, as Figure 3 shows, the percentage of RAs with a completion rate of over 70% varies from a low of 16%, for the catering and bakeries tools, to a high of 48%, for the COVID-19 tool. Plausible reasons for this include the fact that OiRA might have been used as a complementary instead of a primary RA tool, potential confusion during the screening questions, and other issues, which are explained in detail in the key findings of this report (see also section 2.4, How is OiRA used?). It is also important to consider that the statistics do not clarify how many users abandoned the RA after trying it. In addition, they do not account for the users who are still in the process of completing it and might therefore achieve a higher completion rate at a later moment.

⁸ The information in this section is based on statistics from the OiRA project gathered with Metabase.

⁹ Accessed in September 2024.

Figure 3. Top OiRA risk assessments

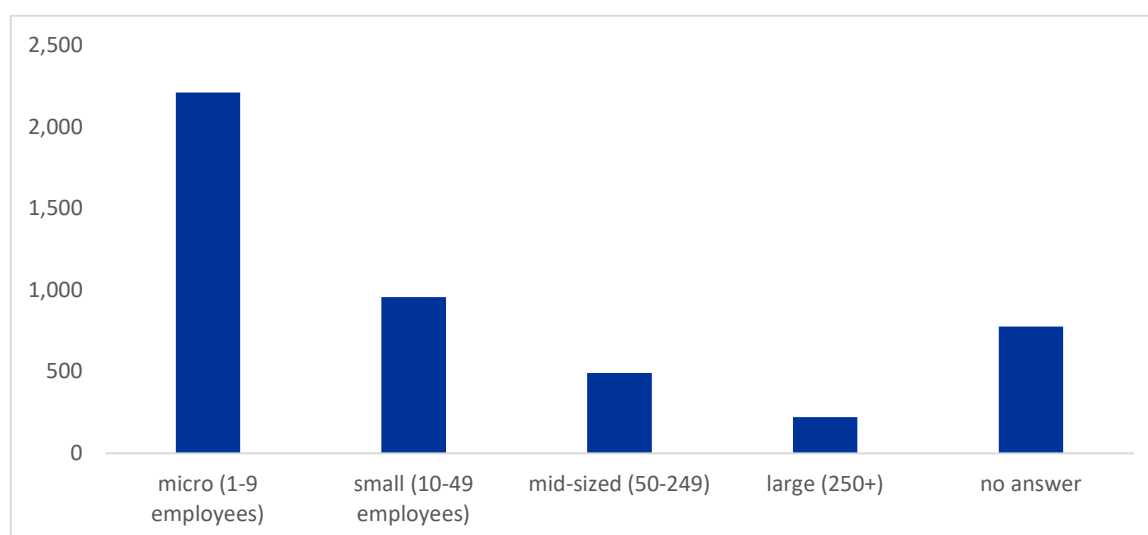


Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase¹⁰

▪ Profile, and experiences of the companies using OiRA

OiRA collects voluntary feedback in the form of a questionnaire, to gather some information about its users. The following figures refer to the users who have answered this questionnaire and not to the overall number of OiRA users in Cyprus. Concerning the size of companies using OiRA, the tools appear to have reached the relevant target audiences in Cyprus, with the majority of registered users (47.4%, 2,209 out of 4,656) coming from micro-enterprises, followed by small (20.5%) and medium-sized (10.6%) enterprises. In turn, large enterprises accounted for a minority of the total sample (4.8%; see also Figure 4).

Figure 4. Size of companies using OiRA



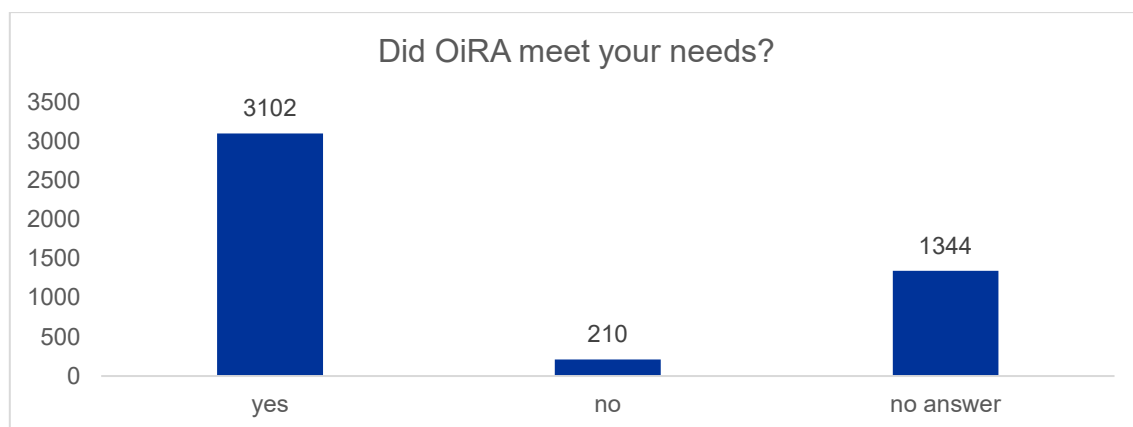
Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase¹¹

¹⁰ Accessed in September 2024.

¹¹ Accessed in September 2024.

Overall, the registered users were positive about OiRA's ability to meet their needs, a finding that was corroborated during the interviews that took place in the context of this study. Specifically, as Figure 5 shows, 67% of the registered users (3,102 out of 4,656) reported that OiRA met their needs, with the percentage climbing to 94% when those who did not answer this specific question are excluded.¹²

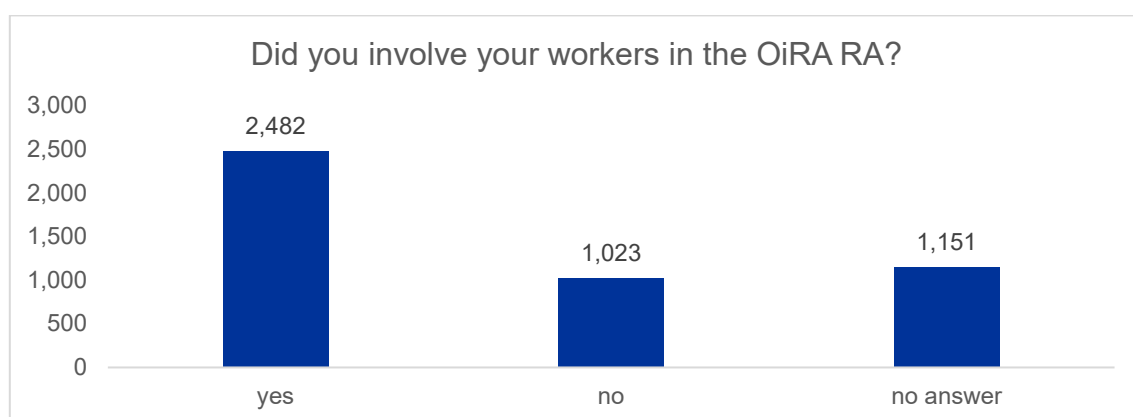
Figure 5. Users' feedback on OiRA meeting their needs



Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase¹³

The majority of registered users who answered the questionnaire also reported that they had involved workers in the RA process. As Figure 6 below shows, more than half of the registered users (53.3%, 2,482 out of 4,656) reported that workers were involved in the process, whereas approximately one in five registered users (22%) reported not involving them. Approximately one out of three registered users who responded to the survey did not answer the question (25%).

Figure 6. Worker involvement in OiRA risk assessments



Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase¹⁴

¹² 29% or 1,344 out of the 4,656 responses.

¹³ Accessed in September 2024.

¹⁴ Accessed in September 2024.

▪ Awareness around OiRA

According to the survey statistics, the majority of users found out about the OiRA tools **from national public institutions** (52.4%, 2,438 out of 4,656), followed by **health and safety experts** (7%, 308 out of 4,656), and **employers' organisations** (5.5%, 255 out of 4,656). A low number of users reported to have found out about OiRA from **EU institutions** (3%, 144 out of 4,656), and an even lower number from **trade unions** (1.5%, 72 out of 4,656). Finally, some respondents reported that they had learnt about the tool via other means (8%, 389 out of 4,656) or did not respond to this specific question (23%, 1,050 out of 4,656). These findings echo those of this study, which found that the majority of participants found out about OiRA from the DLI as well as, in the case of OSH professionals, from seminars or their peers, including through word of mouth.

4 Methodology, challenges and adjustments to this study

This section outlines the methods used to carry out this study, alongside their limitations and the mitigation measures taken.

4.1 Sampling and recruitment

The methodology consists of desk-based research combined with a number of scoping interviews with the DLI, which informed the first section of this report. Interviews and a survey with users that inform the key findings of this report as set out in Chapter 5, were carried out after this preparatory work.

The fieldwork took place between October 2023 and October 2024 and included a total number of 25 interviews¹⁵ and nine relevant inputs to a survey. The study followed purposive, non-probability sampling, aiming to maximise the opportunity to capture opinions from organisations of smaller sizes and from a wide range of sectors covered by the OiRA tools, with an emphasis on those using the OiRA tools. The aim was to generate specific insights around the OiRA tools from their intended target audience, rather than broader insights around RAs. However, as a result of a low response rate, the study ultimately relied on convenience sampling, and recruited participants who were available to participate, irrespective of the OiRA tool that they have used, and their organisations' size and sector.

Table 3 presents an overview of the establishments that took part in the study. These are classified into four categories: large (>250 workers), medium (50-249 workers), small (10-49 workers) and micro (<10 workers) (European Commission, 2016). All the interviewees apart from one¹⁶ reported that they had used OiRA at least once.

It is worth noting that all interviewees were OSH professionals,¹⁷ that is, safety and health officers or managers, including safety, health and quality/facilities managers. Those interviewees were working as in-house consultants,¹⁸ while some of them were also accredited as external consultants (EXYPP) by the DLI.

Table 3. Summary of the study sample (interviewees)

No	Company sector	Size
1	Consulting	Small
2	Chemicals	Small

¹⁵ This number excludes the scoping interviews and meetings with the Department of Labour Inspection.

¹⁶ See Table 3, No 24 (Pharmaceuticals).

¹⁷ This excludes No 19 (Retail), No 20 (Hotel) and No 21 (Education) in Table 3 where the persons responsible for the risk assessments were an owner, a public administration and personnel officer, and a human resources manager, respectively.

¹⁸ This excludes No 1 (Consulting) who was exclusively an external services provider (EXYPP).

No	Company sector	Size
3	Retail (clothing)	Small
4	Advocacy organisation	Medium
5	Processing	Medium
6	Hotel	Medium
7	Cement industry	Medium
8	Education	Medium
9	Public	Medium
10	Healthcare, medical research, education	Medium
11	Educational	Large
12	Pharmaceuticals	Large
13	Consulting	Large
14	Public	Large
15	Health and beauty	Large
16	Supermarket	Large
17	Food	Large
18	Banking	Large
19	Retail (automotive parts)	Large
20	Hotel	Large
21	Education	Large
22	Banking	Large
23	Food	Large
24	Pharmaceuticals	Large

Source: Ecorys, based on interviews

In order to recruiting the participants, the research team used the following methods:

- **A conference** organised by CYSHA on Digitalisation and new forms of work on 19 October 2023 in Cyprus. The research team presented the study at the conference and encouraged participants, including OSH professionals in the audience, to participate and disseminate the study.
- **A survey** that was administered to a long list of OiRA users, provided by the DLI, for the purposes of the study.
- **Telephone follow-ups** to the long list of OiRA users that was provided by the DLI for the purposes of the study.
- **Recommendations from EU-OSHA's focal point in Cyprus.**
- **Social media** recruitment, e.g. through outreach to OSH professionals in LinkedIn.

- **The Enterprise Europe Network Cyprus (EENC)** kindly offered its assistance and disseminated the opportunity to participate in the study to its members, and on social media.
- **Snowball sampling.** The research team asked for recommendations of the interviewees regarding potential participants for the study.

As noted above, the survey gathered input from nine establishments, as shown below. Input from the survey has been used to complement the interview findings.

Table 4. Study sample (survey)

No	Company sector	Size	OiRA user	Tool
1	Other	Small	Yes	Office work
2	Construction	Small	Yes	Office work
3	Other service activities	Small	Yes	Office work
4	Manufacturing	Small	Yes	Multiple ¹⁹
5	Education	Medium	Yes	Office work
6	Professional, scientific, and technical activities	Small	No	N/A
7	Other service activities	Small	No	N/A
8	Other	Small	No	N/A
9	Information and communication	Large	No	N/A

Source: Ecorys, based on survey

4.2 Categories and analytical lenses

The study reached an acceptable degree of theoretical saturation, as the number of interviews allowed the identification of common patterns across the interview data and no new major insights emerged from the interviews. However, as explained under section 4.1 Sampling and recruitment, the study's sample was ultimately a convenience one, and therefore the generalisation of its findings must be treated with a certain degree of circumspection.

In particular, the sample did not include the desired number of SMEs, and did not cover all sectoral tools, as was the original intention. Instead, it was skewed towards larger organisations using a narrow pool of tools, such as the tool for office work, and users who were primarily using OiRA as a complementary tool for their RA. This self-selection bias towards larger establishments might also be explained by their typically higher level of engagement with OSH issues.

Selecting interviewees from larger companies introduced additional limitations: the overwhelming majority of the interviewees consulted for this study were OSH professionals²⁰ and therefore the report and its findings consider principally their views, and not those of the users who belong to the tools' main target audience, that is, users with limited experience in OSH, such as small business owners. In addition, as the report will illustrate later on (see section 5.2.2), these OSH professionals were often using OiRA as a tool to sense-check or complement their in-house or external RAs, and not as their main RA tool. As a result of this, section 5.3, How is OiRA used?, provides a more general account of the steps that

¹⁹ COVID-19, shops, office work.

²⁰ According to Cyprus's management and safety at work regulations of 2021 (see section 2.1, Legal framework), large enterprises must have an OSH professional.

establishments follow in order to perform an RA, compared to a specific account of how establishments do so using the OiRA tool. By the same token, while the study originally sought to distinguish between users who rely on OiRA as their primary tool for RA and those who use other methods, this distinction was not possible due to a lack of users in the sample who were not using OiRA.

While the research team sought to address these shortcomings with several resource-intensive efforts, including phone calls to a long list of OiRA users that was provided by the DLI, time and human resource constraints, as well as lack of engagement on the end of SMEs, among other reasons, made this challenging.

5 Research results

5.1 Motivations, sources of information and challenges to systematic RA

5.1.1 Key motivators for companies to carry out systematic RAs

The primary motivation of the organisations interviewed to conduct systematic RAs, irrespective of their size, was achieving **legal compliance** with Cyprus's **safety and health at work laws of 1996-2023**.

However, according to some of the OSH professionals interviewed (four interviewees), establishments were also increasingly viewing safety and health as a **strategic investment rather than just a regulatory requirement**. In particular, interviewees reported a growing recognition that poor safety and health practices can lead to significant economic losses, including high absence rates, compensation claims and high staff turnover. Other external reasons for conducting systematic RAs were also mentioned. For example, for Cyprus' hotel sector, which has great importance for the country,²¹ according to one interviewee, poor practices in relation to OSH might also be unacceptable from tour operators, who often request RAs as part of their due diligence process.

Generally, while the OSH professionals interviewed acknowledged that there were still significant steps to be taken regarding safety and health, they reported a **growing awareness of its importance among businesses and workers**. This awareness was more prominent among the large organisations interviewed, which often went beyond meeting the minimum legal requirements for OSH and implemented additional measures. In addition, it was found to be more pronounced among the young generation of workers, for whom safety and health appeared to be an integral part of their work.²² In contrast, according to anecdotal evidence from the DLI, MSEs were often not aware of their legal obligations.²³ According to one OSH professional, as court rulings increasingly demonstrate that workplace accidents can result from psychosocial risks, companies may think more carefully about those risks too in the future as part of their RA process.

5.1.2 Challenges to systematic RAs

This section describes the main challenges that establishments interviewed face in conducting systematic RAs. As shown earlier (see section 4.2), this section draws principally from and therefore represents the views of larger establishments, as the study team had challenges in recruiting smaller ones.²⁴

²¹ The tourism and hospitality industry is one of the largest economic sectors in Cyprus, with a GDP contribution close to 15%, see: Invest Cyprus. Tourism and hospitality: <https://www.investcyprus.org.cy/tourism-and-hospitality/#:~:text=The%20tourism%20and%20hospitality%20industry,and%20invest%20in%20the%20island>

²² Source: Interview with safety and health manager working in a group of companies in health and beauty products with over 500 workers.

²³ This finding was corroborated from a market research that was conducted in order to increase the sample size.

²⁴ SMEs on the DLI's long list of contacts (see also section 4.1) were difficult to recruit as they often reported to be unavailable for an interview due to lack of time or due to the absence of the owner/responsible person for OSH from the facilities. A market research company that was recruited to engage with SMEs also reported lack of awareness of the safety and health obligations on their behalf, corroborating the anecdotal evidence from the DLI.

Interviews with the said companies revealed that the **most significant challenge in systematic RA and management was the follow-up on the measures proposed to address the identified risks**. This challenge was influenced by the **nature of a business's operations**, the **available budget** and its **workplace culture**.

For example, a safety and health officer in a large processing company that operates 24/7 noted that **implementing safety and health measures could slow down production, leading sometimes to resistance** from production department heads. A similar view was shared by a health, safety and quality manager in the healthcare, medical research and education sector:

People are often very busy, and although they understand the importance of health and safety, sometimes they prioritise speed over safety; for example, some medical or research staff might neglect to wear protective glasses.

Health, safety and quality officer, healthcare, medical research and education sector (OiRA for office work)

Some interviewees (three) also reported **budget constraints as a challenge**, particularly when implementing measures related to facilities. This issue was reported to be more complex when the facilities were owned by third parties. For instance, an educational institution had to find alternative locations to set up a bio-lab with the required safety level, because the owner of its existing facilities was unwilling to make the necessary upgrades due to the associated costs. Similarly, an interviewee working in the public sector reported difficulties in coordinating with the external facility manager to implement the proposed measures to their premises.

Several interviewees reported that **workplace culture** can also affect the implementation and follow-up of proposed measures. In particular, some of the safety and health managers from large organisations (four) highlighted that **lack of engagement and competing priorities of staff members responsible for implementing the proposed measures** can pose challenges to systematic RAs and management. According to these managers, although staff members were often well positioned to implement the measures due to their familiarity with the workplace and its activities, their increasing workload may lead them to prioritise operational tasks (e.g. teaching) over health and safety.

Despite these challenges, the interviews revealed evidence of progress, with some interviewees reporting no obstacles and others reporting an increased demand for health and safety induction training for new employees and more engaged participation in the safety committees.

5.1.3 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on RAs

Although limited, the available information indicated that the pandemic led to a reorientation of safety and health priorities for a few (three) of the organisations interviewed. For example, a safety and health officer from a hotel with over 250 workers highlighted that during the pandemic there was a **notable shift towards managing biological risks related to COVID-19, which resulted in other types of risks being temporarily overlooked**. A safety and health officer in the banking sector also reported a prioritisation of these risks. Additionally, a safety and health manager from the cement industry noted that the prioritisation of biological risks prompted changes in work organisation, to prevent, for example, the overcrowding of workers during their breaks.

5.1.4 Information sources about OSH

The interview findings revealed that OSH professionals used a diverse range of sources to obtain information on OSH.

The **DLI**, providing information through its website, newsletters and seminars as well as on-site visits, was cited as the most used source, followed by **EU-OSHA** and the **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** in the United Kingdom.

Other international organisations, such as the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the **European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)**, and **agencies from various EU and non-EU countries**, including **Australia** (Safe Work Australia, SWA), **Canada** (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, CCOHS), **Germany** (Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, BAuA), **Greece** (Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety, ELINYAE), **Ireland** (Health and Safety Authority, HSA), and the **United States** (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA), were also mentioned as key sources of OSH information. Additionally, professionals relied on industry-specific sources and standards, such as **ISO standards** and **technical fiches for equipment**, with a few also using **EU directives** and the **Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber**.

Beyond these institutional sources, OSH professionals reported leveraging peer learning and networking with OSH experts from other countries to find information about OSH and RA approaches.

Overall, **the choice of information sources appeared to depend on the business's activities** and the **previous experiences of safety and health managers**, including their academic background, work experience and professional networking. For instance, on some occasions, OSH professionals turned to specialised associations such as the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) or membership organisations such as the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) for relevant information.

5.2 How is OiRA chosen?

5.2.1 How did the company find out about OiRA?

In line with the online questionnaire results presented in section 3.2 Use of OiRA tools, the interviews revealed that the majority of interviewees (11) reported having learnt about OiRA via the **DLI** and in particular through its seminars, workshops, on-site visits, and information campaigns, including TV and radio advertisements. These promotional activities made OiRA a familiar source among users, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the use of the relevant tool saw a significant uptake (EU-OSHA, 2023b). The interviews further revealed that users who first became aware of the COVID-19 OiRA tool later explored one of the sectoral tools available, although the opposite scenario was also reported, with two interviewees reporting that they had used the sectoral tools first.

The Department of Labour Inspection came for an inspection and recommended that we use OiRA ... Following this, I completed OiRA with the owner of the shops, and we even took it a step further and created a more detailed risk assessment.

Accountant, assisting an SME owner of a retail sector in risk assessments (OiRA for shops)

I came across OiRA through the Labour Inspectors. I realised that they were doing a very good job. They wanted to help SMEs to perform risk assessments without having to rely on an external consultant. However, much of the information of OiRA that applies to SMEs, also applies to big companies ...

Health and safety manager, large enterprise in the hotel sector (OiRA for guesthouses)

In addition to the DLI, one OSH professional reported discovering OiRA while browsing the EU-OSHA website to find information on another topic, while a few others noted encountering OiRA during safety and health seminars, or by word of mouth.

5.2.2 What was the motivation to select OiRA? Who took part in the decision-making process?

Overall, RA approaches were chosen by owners in small SMEs or by OSH professionals in larger enterprises.

For the **public sector and SMEs**, the main motivation to use OiRA was the fact that it is a free-of-charge tool and therefore **reduces the need to hire an external consultant and incur the associated costs** of their services.

OiRA gives the possibility to the responsible person for OSH to conduct a risk assessment in their own time, without having to pay for an external consultant,

Survey respondent, medium-sized organisation, education sector (OiRA for office work)

For the larger enterprises interviewed, which typically performed assessments in-house or with the help of an external consultant, the main motivation was not reducing costs. Instead, the OSH professionals in **large enterprises**, some of whom were also accredited as external consultants, **reported using OiRA primarily as an information source to complement their own RAs or as a verification tool to ensure the comprehensiveness of their assessments.**

Several interviewees (seven), being OSH professionals, indeed revealed that they were integrating the information from OiRA, often in conjunction with other information sources, into their own RA templates, which were customised to the particular needs of their businesses, or sectors.

I have used OiRA alongside other information from the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the European Chemicals Agency to design my own risk assessment.

Health and safety manager, chemicals sector (OiRA for office work, woodworking)

Additionally, some OSH professionals (four) reported using OiRA to validate their own RAs and verify whether any potential risks or mitigation measures had been overlooked. For example, a safety and health manager working in a group of companies in health and beauty products reported using OiRA to ensure that their branches were adhering to the relevant safety and health regulations.

I have used OiRA to sense-check whether we are applying all the necessary measures for our branches ... The tool pointed me to things that are sometimes taken for granted, such as placing lighter items on lower shelves or having rest areas for workers in our retail stores ... It reassured me that we had all these things covered.

Health and safety manager, health and beauty products (OiRA for shops)

In some cases, OiRA was also used for **educational purposes**, for example, by academics in a postgraduate degree related to OSH,²⁵ as well as more broadly by OSH professionals who wanted to gain new insights into risk management. For example, one OSH professional noted that while OiRA's general approach was less suited to their workplace, because their establishment involved various departments and risks, using OiRA still provided them with valuable information that could be used, particularly in areas such as office ergonomics.

Timing was also reported to be the main motivation to use OiRA on some occasions. For example, according to interviews held with the labour inspectors, several restaurants were in a hurry to obtain a petroleum storage permit to operate during the summer. Therefore, they used the OiRA tool for cafes and restaurants, as the inspectors recommended it as the fastest available solution to perform an RA related to this issue and obtain a permit. Although OiRA appeared to be sufficient for conducting an RA in that particular case, uncertainties around its legal status were an issue mentioned.

All in all, the key findings from the interview data suggested that **OiRA can help establishments, and in particular the public sectors and SMEs, to conduct their RAs in-house** and therefore plays an important role in saving resources while achieving compliance with national legislation. In contrast, **for larger enterprises, OiRA did not appear to replace the need for an external consultant** due to the complex and multifaceted nature of their facilities, activities and associated risks, which typically require specialist knowledge. Equally, **OiRA did not replace the existing written RAs in these enterprises**. Instead, it was used as a tool to complement or verify their information.

In all the aforementioned cases, **OiRA's reference to Cypriot safety and health legislation was consistently highlighted in the interviews as a key strength across all the tools**.

5.3 How is OiRA used?

This section begins with an overview of how enterprises in Cyprus perform RAs, and then situates the OiRA tools within this context, describing how the interviewed enterprises reported to use them as part of the RA process. As noted in section 4.2 Categories and analytical lenses, of this report, as a result of the sample composition, information on the second element, that is, the RA process through OiRA, is limited.

5.3.1 How is the RA process organised with OiRA?

The study found that the role of OiRA in the RA process varied based on whether establishments used the tools as the primary or secondary means of conducting assessments.

In establishments using OiRA as a primary tool for RAs (i.e. especially the public sector and SMEs), the RA was typically conducted either by OSH professionals or, in smaller establishments, by the business owner or a member of ESYPP. As demonstrated in the following sections (see sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3), while some of these users conducted the RA through OiRA in one go, others were saving their progress and continuing their RA at a later stage, after inspecting their workplaces' facilities or consulting their employees (e.g. in relation to specific questions generated by the OiRA tool).

In turn, in establishments using OiRA as a secondary tool for RAs (i.e. especially larger enterprises), interviewees often skipped on-site visits, as these visits had been conducted as part of a previous RA process either in-house or with the assistance of an external consultant. As shown earlier (see section 5.2.2), OSH professionals in these establishments were typically using OiRA to inform, ensure the comprehensiveness of and validate their own RAs, by looking, for example, for any risks or measures that might have been potentially overlooked.

In general, the responsibility to implement the proposed measures fell to managers, department heads or supervisors, who were often also members of the safety committees required by the Cypriot legislation for businesses with over 10 persons (MLSI & DLI 2013). In turn, the follow-up on the implementation of the measures fell to the in-house person responsible for OSH.

²⁵ Source: Discussion with attendees, that is, academic staff members in the context of an event held by the Cyprus Safety and Health Association in 2023, where the team promoted OiRA (see also section 4.1, Sampling and recruitment).

Across all interviews, **consulting external experts for specific risks** and **fostering a workplace culture that emphasises safety and health** also emerged as key factors in conducting comprehensive RAs and creating a safe and healthy work environment.

In particular, the overwhelming majority of interviewees **highlighted the critical role of workers in conducting a comprehensive RA and reported consulting them in several ways**, including informal meetings during site visits, interviews and others. Especially in large enterprises, several interviewees highlighted the role of the workers in helping OSH professionals to identify and find solutions to risks (see also section 5.3.6, Worker involvement in RAs).

Also, **external consultants were frequently cited as necessary in terms of bringing in complementary experiences or specific expertise**. For example, while the pharmaceuticals company noted above conducted its RA process in-house, it recruited external experts to ensure compliance with the ATEX Directive that describes the minimum requirements for workplaces and equipment used in explosive atmospheres and requires specialist knowledge (European Parliament and the Council, 2014).

Finally, **having a workplace culture that emphasises safety and health** was also cited as contributing to having meaningful RAs rather than simply meeting compliance requirements. This was particularly the case in the large companies interviewed, where safety and health appeared to be embedded in the work practices, and where OSH professionals created an environment of trust with the workers.

5.3.2 How much time do users need to complete an RA using OiRA?

The time spent to complete a full RA with OiRA depended on several factors. These included the **experience of the user, the processes followed to complete the RA and the tool itself**, as well as **the size and complexity of the workplace**. In general, based on the interview data, the time spent on OiRA could range from as little as 30 minutes in small enterprises, to several weeks, in larger enterprises with several facilities, complex equipment and diverse job tasks. Complementing OiRA's RA with additional personalised risks was also reported by one user to increase the completion time.

In terms of the user's experience, less experienced users sometimes had to take additional time or ask for clarifications from their peers to proceed with some of the RA questions in the tools.

The characteristics of the specific sectoral tool itself were also reported to play a role in the time needed to complete the RA. For example, an interviewee in an SME working with chemicals noted that compared to the other OiRA tools that they used, the one for office work required less time. The COVID-19 OiRA tool was also reported to be time-consuming by one interviewee, as 'everything was new during that period'.

5.3.3 How do users complete OiRA?

Interviewed users reported that they completed their RA in OiRA either in one go or after pausing it due to competing responsibilities or in order to visit their workplaces' facilities and to get the necessary information to respond to some of the questions listed in the RA.

The interviewed users completed the RA by module, frequently jumping between sections. For example, in some cases, users skipped certain modules that they considered to be better answered by other staff within the organisation. This was the case, for instance, for a health, safety and facilities manager in the educational sector, who reported skipping some modules to consult with colleagues who were more knowledgeable and then returning to complete these modules with the information they provided. Users also returned, on some occasions, to completed modules, to verify their responses, for example, after visiting the workplace facilities.

In general, excluding one interviewee from a public sector organisation who reported adding additional risks to the OiRA tool, interviewees did not use that option. This is because most of them reported to have used OiRA as a complementary tool, and therefore such risks had already been addressed either in their in-house RA or in the RA prepared by an external consultant (see also section 4.2, Categories and analytical lenses).

5.3.4 How often do companies use OiRA?

As discussed earlier, the majority of interviewees reported using OiRA for their RAs as a complementary rather than a primary tool.

For those interviewees who used it as a primary tool for their RA, and in particular **for the public sector organisations in this study, OiRA was reported to be used on an annual basis.**

For the rest of the organisations interviewed and surveyed, RAs, irrespective of the tool used, were either updated **at fixed intervals**, such as annually, or every two to three years, or **whenever there was a change in the workplace.** This could be the recruitment of specific types of workers who might be subject to additional risks, the introduction of new equipment, the creation of a new job role, modifications to the facilities or, in extreme cases, a workplace accident.

For example, an OSH professional working in the hotel sector reported that a new RA is conducted whenever the hotel hires young apprentices, as the kitchen presents additional risks for them compared to older professionals, or for example, when a pregnant woman or someone returning to work after an injury is present in the workplace.

5.3.5 Working with the action plan

As discussed in the previous section, the majority of interviewees reported having used OiRA to complement their in-house or external RA process, especially in terms of identifying risks. Therefore, the interviewees had limited engagement with OiRA's outputs.

However, **two public sector organisations that commented on the action plan provided positive feedback.** For example, one organisation noted that the action plan's measures were relevant and reported implementing measures, such as for example providing staff training on the importance of reading the labels of chemicals before using them. Another organisation also reported that the action plan was useful. However, it also noted challenges in implementing specific measures proposed by the tool, for example, to address risks related to verbal abuse or unacceptable behaviour from third parties, which they found difficult because they did not have written procedures defining what unacceptable behaviour is or outlining its consequences.

Some private sector organisations also provided positive feedback. For example, two large organisations from the educational and banking sector noted that the action plan was able to point internal OSH professionals towards implementing appropriate measures to address risks. This was particularly useful for risks related to areas or equipment with which OSH professionals might be less familiar, such as a kitchenette in an office space.

A banking sector organisation further noted that **the proposed measures were to the point**, and reported to have **applied some of the COVID-19 OiRA tool measures** such as maintaining air conditioning, improving ventilation and placing dividers in the workspace, to sustain operations while ensuring workers' safety and health during the pandemic. The measures in this tool were also found useful by a pharmaceutical company, which noted that they were all feasible and had been implemented.

On the other hand, two large organisations in the banking and the processing sector noted that some of the action plan's measures were irrelevant, resulting from questions in the RA, where the 'not applicable' option was unavailable. In this regard, however, an interviewee also noted the following:

It is better for OiRA to generate a measure that is irrelevant, instead of not listing it at all, as sometimes, even irrelevant measures might point us to something that is important for safety and health.

Health and safety officer, banking sector (OiRA tool for office work, COVID-19)

In addition, one interviewee noted that some of the proposed measures, although interesting, were not nuanced enough, as they resulted from binary questions.

Sometimes a measure comes as a result of a 'yes, or no question'. However, I have something very specific in mind when answering such questions.

Health and safety officer, food service industry (OiRA tool for cafes and restaurants, COVID-19)

Finally, one organisation commented on the full report, noting that it could benefit from changing its file format from Word to Excel to enable quick filtering of risks based on their score, as well as from including a field showing whether action has been taken to address the identified risks. While these features are available in the action plan, they are not foreseen in the full report. It remains unclear if the user was not aware of the action plan or preferred the full report version as an excel table, nevertheless.

5.3.6 Worker involvement in RAs

The approach to involving workers in RAs varied across organisations but generally involved a blend of formal and informal methods.

In terms of formal methods, as explained earlier (see section 1.3, The Cypriot OSH context), the legal framework in Cyprus foresees that each business establishment where 10 or more persons are regularly employed must form a **safety committee**.²⁶

In this context, **the OSH professionals interviewed and surveyed reported actively engaging with their relevant safety committees by several means and in different stages of the RA.**

For example, a safety and health officer in the education sector reported **consulting the safety and health representative of the safety committee** in each of the establishment's faculties and mirroring their concerns in the RA, prepared with the help of an external consultant.

A public sector organisation, operating 11 offices in the country, followed a similar approach. There, the safety and health officer **held meetings with the respective safety committee** of each office to discuss potential risks and mitigation measures. In addition to this, during the RA process, the officer **reviewed every section of OiRA with the president of the safety committees** to identify risks and mitigation measures. A similar approach was followed by a safety and health officer in the education sector, who either **jointly filled in some modules of the OiRA RA with his colleagues** who were better placed to answer them, or **first requested their input, and then verified it.**

Going beyond the formal role of the safety committee in RAs an OSH professional working in the hotel sector also stressed the importance of including workers from different seniority levels in the committee's membership, to ensure that the voice of everyone, and especially of those directly involved in day-to-day work, is heard.

Apart from formally involving the safety committees in the RA process, several of the **OSH professionals interviewed reported involving staff members on a continuous basis, also by using informal means.** According to one interviewee, this can help workers to view safety and health officers as colleagues, fostering trusting relationships. This trust could encourage workers to disclose risks more openly and improve the comprehensiveness of the RA.

We typically have informal talks in a positive climate ... We want to pass the message that we are not present to make an inspection, but rather, to find solutions ... We ask workers to tell us about the risks they see in their day-to-

²⁶ For more information, see Cyprus' Occupational Health and Safety Law of 1996.

day work, and we investigate them in detail, even when some of them appear to be exaggerated.

Health and safety officer, banking sector (OiRA tool for office work, COVID-19)

Across all interviews, whether worker engagement was formal, informal or a combination of both, it was **consistently regarded as essential for conducting a comprehensive RA**. The OSH professionals interviewed repeatedly reported that they sought workers' feedback, especially in large enterprises where oversight from the safety and health officers can be challenging. One example is included in the following:

I highlight to the workers that it is them who have to point me to the different risks that they see in their day-to-day-work, as I cannot be present in all of the laboratories simultaneously.

Safety, health and quality manager, healthcare, medical research and education sector (OiRA tool for office work, COVID-19)

5.3.7 Is OiRA useful during inspection visits?

The vast majority of the sampled interviewees for this study used OiRA as a complementary and not as a primary RA tool. Therefore, they had not used it during inspection visits. However, one organisation within the sample indicated a willingness to use OiRA generated documents during inspection visits if needed.

Nevertheless, there seemed to be uncertainty for many as to whether the OiRA RAs meet the requirements of the DLI for a written RA. This uncertainty could hinder the uptake of the tool and is discussed as a key area for improvement in the concluding section of this report.

5.4 How is OiRA assessed?

This section presents the **key strengths** of the OiRA tools, as well as **challenges to address**.

Overall, the interview data suggested that **OiRA is a valuable tool for conducting or supporting RAs, particularly for SMEs, establishments with low resources available for OSH (e.g. public sector) and those with less experience in OSH.**

The OiRA tools were praised for their **references to the relevant legislation, content quality, user friendliness and accessibility, and their free-of-charge nature**. At the same time, interview data pointed to some challenges to address. These included issues **related to some questions in the OiRA tool** and the need for **further customisation**. A need to **tailor the outputs from OiRA** to better meet their users' needs was also highlighted. These key strengths and challenges are presented in Figure 8 and discussed in detail in the remainder of this section.

Figure 7. OiRA: key strengths and challenges



Source: Ecorys

5.4.1 References to legislation

As seen above (see section 5.1.1, Key motivators for companies to carry out systematic RA), the main motivation of the organisations interviewed to conduct systematic RAs was compliance with Cyprus's **safety and health at work laws of 1996-2023**. Consequently, it is not surprising that the **detailed legislative references in the OiRA tools were highlighted as one of their most important strengths** by the interviewees. Indeed, several interviewees reported that the references to the relevant legislation **helped them to ensure legal compliance and to save time** (from having to search the relevant legislation) but also to **make a stronger case to their employers for implementing specific safety and health measures**. In this regard, an interviewee noted that a clear distinction on whether the proposed measures are required to achieve legal compliance or are examples of good practices would be useful.

Looking ahead, interviewees emphasised the importance of keeping the OiRA tools up to date with the latest OSH legislation and adapting them to the changing nature of work. For example, one interviewee expressed the wish for the OiRA tool for office work to follow developments related to teleworking and remote work.

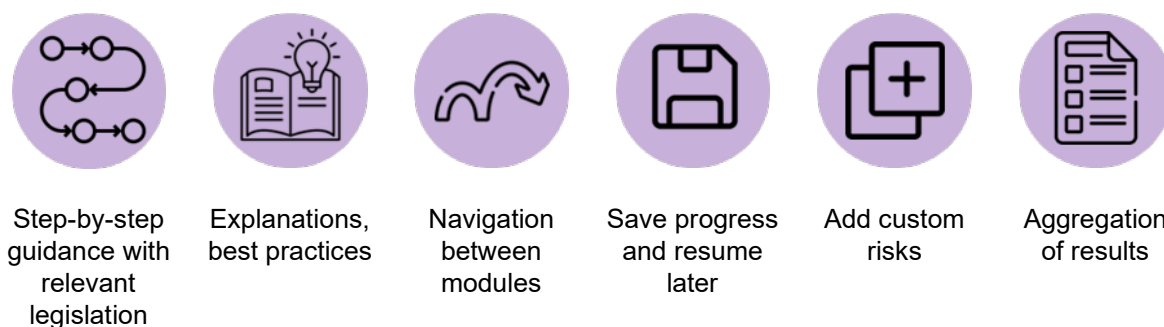
5.4.2 User friendliness

The OiRA tools have been widely reported to be user friendly, enabling users with little to no prior knowledge of OSH to conduct an RA, therefore reducing barriers to use for SMEs. None of the interviewed users reported facing difficulties with the software of the OiRA tools (e.g. including technical issues or issues with the signing up process) and there were only a few reported difficulties in completing the RA process through OiRA. On the contrary, users praised the tools for their simplicity

and ease of use, noting that ‘registering was extremely easy’ and ‘only required an email’, ‘the overall environment was very good’ and ‘the tool was easy to navigate’.

Figure 9 presents specific features that were reported to contribute to the user friendliness of the OiRA tools.

Figure 8. OiRA’s features contributing to user friendliness



Source: Ecorys

As Figure 9 shows, an important feature contributing to the user friendliness of the OiRA tools is their **step-by-step guidance** to help users complete the RA while taking into account relevant legislation. This guidance often includes **explanations of OSH terms** that users might not be familiar with, as well as links to **best practices and videos** to help users better understand the questions posed in the RA.

... for every risk, we can easily find the specific legislation corresponding to it ... this is very useful, as sometimes legislation is complex and difficult to navigate on our own. However, with OiRA, it's all readily available ...

Safety and health officer in the food sector (OiRA tool for bakeries)

An additional feature that was highly praised in both interviews and in the survey results is the possibility to **jump between modules**, as well as to save the progress and resume the RA later. As noted in the previous sections, some interviewed OSH professionals used these features, reporting that they facilitated their RA process. For example, a health, safety and facilities officer in the education sector reported delegating some modules to his colleagues who were better placed to answer them. Similarly, an OSH professional, working also as an external consultant, highlighted that the option to **save the RA and continue at a later stage** is important for both SMEs and large companies, considering their competing responsibilities or the need, for example, to carry out on-site visits, and continue the assessment later on.

Finally, a safety and health officer in the public sector found the option to **add their own risks** to the RA beneficial, as it enhances the comprehensiveness of the tool, while a health, safety and facilities officer in the education sector found it useful that OiRA aggregates and **presents its results in an electronic format**. The user appreciated specifically the time-saving aspect as information does not have to be written down when using OiRA.

5.4.3 Content quality

The interview data suggested that OiRA tools are **comprehensive** and **trustable for informing RAs**. These tools were reported to cover a broad range of risks in detail, **improving the users' knowledge and awareness of OSH**. Indeed, the OiRA tools' questions were reported to enhance users' knowledge and **highlight issues users had not previously considered in their RA**. This finding was consistent across several OiRA tools (for example, for the OiRA tools related to office work, educational

establishments and COVID-19) and was generally observed across all interviewed users, regardless of their seniority.

OiRA prompted me to revisit and learn about issues that I was previously unaware of, such as the requirement to place fire extinguishers at a certain height ... It led me to review certain information sources to confirm whether some safety and health issues are addressed.

... OiRA also points you to issues that can be understated, such as lighting, ventilation, air quality etc. Through highlighting these aspects, the tools probe us to consider them and improve our overall safety and health culture.

Health, safety and facilities manager, educational sector (OiRA tool for educational establishments)

... OiRA highlighted the need for an additional risk assessment for a loft used as storage. This assessment required determining and listing the loft's maximum load capacity and understanding how to properly arrange the different items on it, to minimise risks. In this way, OiRA has shown us that something was missing.

Safety and health officer in the banking sector (OiRA tool for office work)

OiRA tools were also praised for their detailed coverage of diverse types of risks within workplaces. For example, an interviewee commended the OiRA education tool **for covering not only risks associated with facilities** (e.g. a classroom) **but also risks related to activities taking place within and beyond these facilities** (e.g. during an excursion outside of the classroom). Similarly, another interviewee who used the OiRA tool for the hotel sector valued its flexibility. He pointed to the tool's **ability to distinguish between various hotel facilities**, such as buildings and restaurants, **as each of these is subject to different risks**.

Overall, a key asset contributing to the quality of content is that **the OiRA tools are verified by the DLI in Cyprus**. According to an OSH professional who was involved in their initial development, this verification helps users trust that the content is accurate and suitable. Indeed, three surveyed OSH professionals also reported the DLI's involvement as one of the key attributes contributing to the credibility of the OiRA tools.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the assessment of the coverage of the tools often depended on the type of user and their purpose of using the tools. In practice, this means that **what worked well for one user or purpose might have been less effective for another**. For example, while large enterprises with numerous and complex risks felt that there was room for further specialisation of the questions, some small enterprises with fewer and less complex risks found the questions to be exhaustive.

Enterprises have also put forward some suggestions regarding the content of the RAs. For example, one interviewee noted that being able to add photos in the RA might have been a useful option, while another one suggested including the financial implications a business might face if specific risks are not addressed.

5.4.4 Free-of-charge nature

Interviewees, particularly from SMEs and public sector organisations, cited the free-of-charge nature of the OiRA tools as a significant benefit. Without OiRA, these organisations would need to hire external consultants and incur costs in order to achieve compliance with the relevant OSH legislation. As seen earlier (see also section 2.3.2), this aspect was especially valued in the public sector, where resources are often constrained.

5.4.5 Challenges of non-applicability, repetition and language in RA questions

One issue that was stressed by almost all the interviewees was the **inability to mark some questions in the RA as not applicable to the user's workplace**. This created confusion among users and often resulted in them providing incorrect input to the RA, such as indicating that measures that were not applicable to their situation were in place, generating irrelevant follow-up questions and action plans that did not accurately reflect the conditions on the ground. Equally, **on some occasions, the questions posed in the RA request either a yes or a no answer, when, in fact, the situation might be more complex**. An interviewee who used the OiRA tool for office work illustrated this point with the following example:

... In the OiRA tool for office work, there is a question on whether all screens in the office are appropriate. In this case, some might be, while others are not. Therefore, it was difficult to respond to this question simply with a 'yes', or a 'no'.

Safety and health officer in the hotel sector (OiRA tool for office work, COVID-19)

In addition to the above, tools were found by three of the OSH professionals interviewed to be somewhat **repetitive**. For example, one interviewee noted that on some occasions, OiRA asked about the same factor, such as the quality of lighting, in different facilities, such as the shopfloor, the storage areas and so on. This interviewee felt that asking about the same factor in multiple facilities was redundant, as they consider such factors holistically in their RAs. However, **it should be noted that other interviewees appreciated this level of specificity and generally users appreciated a certain flexibility of the tool allowing for accurate adaptation to different premises**. An OSH professional in a medium-sized school even suggested that enabling the tool **to record the risks that each of their classrooms presents** through having, for example, a separate sheet for each class would have helped him to gain a comprehensive picture of the entire school. This underscores the earlier point that the assessment of the tools is closely linked to the individual user and their preferences as well as sometimes to the size of the establishment.

Finally, interview data also pointed to some issues around the **language of the tool causing confusion for the participants**. For example, OiRA requires users to provide input using terms with which users might have been unfamiliar, such as accident records, staff records and so on. According to the DLI, these terms are now accompanied with examples and templates for clarification purposes. Indeed, in general, interviewees reported that the language of the tool was overall clear, and easy to understand. Nevertheless, a small number of interviewees (three) still reported that some of the terms used in the OiRA tools might be difficult to understand and could possibly benefit from simplification.

5.4.6 Need for customisation and balancing the level of information

In general, while the assessment of OiRA was influenced by the type of user and their preferences, the interview data suggested that there might be room for giving possibilities to further customise the tools and balance the level of information that they generate for users.

In Cyprus, 95.1% (103,836 out of the 109,220) of registered businesses in 2020 employed 0-9 workers (Statistical Service of Cyprus, 2022). According to an OSH professional interviewed, the comprehensiveness of OiRA might discourage these companies, which based on anecdotal evidence might often not even be aware of their legal obligations in relation to OSH, from completing their RA through OiRA. To address this issue, this OSH professional suggested that **OiRA tools could be more modular and offer the option to adapt the number as well as the specificity of their questions based on the user's experience or preferences**. Having said that, it is important to note that the interviewed organisations reported to have been overall satisfied with the content of the tool.

5.4.7 Output format of OiRA compared to other methods

The majority of the OSH professionals interviewed were conducting the RA either in-house or with the help of an external consultant. In this context, while there were various RAs methods used apart from OiRA, there were also some similarities between these methods, more pronounced among large enterprises. In particular compared to OiRA, these enterprises reported to use RA methods — often in a Word or Excel file format — that allowed **for better customisation to the unique aspects of their workplaces**, including their specific facilities, activities and associated risks. These RA methods were also reported to offer **more functionalities**, such as helping OSH professionals get a quick overview of a specific branch of their establishment, for example, by storing information for each branch in a separate spreadsheet. Finally, the RAs were also reported to use a **colour coded RA matrix**, such as the one illustrated in Table 6. Such a matrix was considered as the gold standard by all OSH professionals interviewed for the study as it allows a clear ranking of risks, and sequentially the prioritisation of relevant actions to address them.

Table 5. Risk assessment matrix, likelihood versus severity

		Severity				
		Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Severe
Likelihood	Very likely	Low Medium	Medium	Med Hi	High	High
	Likely	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium High	High
	Possible	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium High	Medium High
	Unlikely	Low	Low Medium	Low Medium	Medium	Medium High
	Very unlikely	Low	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium

Source: RiskPal. Risk assessment matrices: Understanding the tools of risk management. <https://riskpal.com/risk-assessment-matrices/>

Indeed, according to several interviewees, **the format of the OiRA outputs**, while aggregating all of the RA's information in a single document, did not meet the above requirements. As one OSH professional in the processing sector noted:

... I am used to working with risk matrices (based on likelihood versus severity) which are easier to process, compared to the OiRA risk assessment, which is in text.

Safety and health officer in the processing sector (OiRA tool for COVID-19)

However, it needs to be taken into account here that OiRA has been developed for MSEs, focusing on their specific situation. Due to the specific recruitment issues in this study, larger enterprises and OSH experts with more specific knowledge were included in the sample but for certain aspects their feedback needs to be carefully looked at within this context before translating it into recommendations for changes in the tools.

5.5 Ideas and areas for improvement

Interviewees were asked what type of changes or improvements could bring OiRA closer to their needs. Figure 10 summarises interviewees' key ideas on these points, which are further detailed in the remainder of this section.

Figure 9. Ideas and areas for improving the OiRA tools



Clarifying OiRA's compliance with written RA requirements and keeping the tools up to date



Request for multi-user access



Providing training opportunities on using OiRA

Source: Ecorys

Clarification of OiRA's formal status

An important element that could enhance the uptake of the OiRA tools is **clarifying whether their use complies with the DLI requirements for written RAs**. At the time of writing, the OiRA tools did not prompt users to include in their written assessments some features that are typically part of these requirements. Therefore, in the case of a workplace accident, it remains at the discretion of the labour inspector to determine whether an RA done with OiRA can serve as sufficient proof of an RA in line with the provisions of Cypriot legislation.

Addressing this issue might require parallel activities, such as **clarifying whether the use of the OiRA tools by non-OSH professionals can be considered as sufficient proof in case of workplace inspections**.

According to a number of interviewees, if the above issues are clarified, placing the OiRA RA in a shared environment where the DLI can access user's data at any time could also be considered as a useful option, provided that potential challenges related to GDPR, cybersecurity and, more broadly, resources can be addressed. This approach could provide the DLI with a real-time overview of establishments' legal compliance.

Request for multi-user access to RAs

A small number of interviewees also put forward the idea of hosting the OiRA RA and its associated outputs, such as the action plan, in a shared environment, with the view to enabling multiple users, for example, within and outside a specific organisation (e.g. external consultants), to access and modify it. However, there is already a feature available in the OiRA tools, suggesting that there might be a need to further advertise it, alongside the other options that the tool can provide. In addition, the possibility to enlarge this feature by a specific approach to enable OSH service providers to collaborate with their clients has been developed but has not yet been made available in the Cypriot OiRA tools.

Providing training opportunities focusing on OSH knowledge in relation to OiRA

While OiRA has been reported as an intuitive and comprehensive tool, the quality of its outputs also relies on the users' input. In this regard, one interviewee working in the public sector noted that providing the OiRA users with relevant training on how to appropriately complete a RA using the tool could improve their rigour and help their users to broaden their knowledge around safety and health. The same finding was reported from a small organisation that responded to the study's survey. Similarly, one interviewee suggested that it could be useful for the OiRA tools to have a support team, for example, from the DLI,

to help users while they are filling in the RA. This interviewee, however, acknowledged that this might have significant budget/resource implications. In this regard, other options, such as encouraging users to contact the DLI with ad hoc requests, might be more feasible. Finally, one interviewee noted that having more details, such as explaining how a risk can be dealt with step by step could also improve their understanding of, and applicability of, the OiRA results.

5.6 What is the impact of RAs done with or supported by OiRA?

Overall, OiRA has been found to be a **comprehensive** and **trustable** method, covering a broad range of risks in detail, and improving its users' knowledge and awareness of OSH issues. Although it is true that some OiRA tools might be a better fit for some businesses than others, the overall added value of the OiRA tools, especially for MSEs, and junior OSH professionals, was highlighted throughout the interviews. This could also be the case for those participating as representatives in the safety committees. For example, one surveyed individual reported that:

Discovering and using OiRA helped me understand how the overall framework around safety and health should work, the relevant legislative requirements, and the different areas where risks are present and must be evaluated ... This helped me to follow more easily the relevant seminars for being a member, as well as a representative of the Safety Committee.

Survey input from respondent, small-sized organisation, 'other' sector (OiRA tool for office work)

Would they recommend OiRA to others?

In line with the OiRA general questionnaire results reported in section 3, OiRA in Cyprus, the interviewees in this study reported that they would recommend OiRA, especially to junior OSH professionals but also to more senior peers, as a useful means to learn more about and improve OSH at their workplaces.

As described earlier, the DLI in Cyprus also plays a key role in recommending and promoting the OiRA tools, with users additionally discovering them in workshops and networking events and through word of mouth.

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

The OiRA tools pointed OSH professionals to some aspects that they had not considered prior to the RA. In particular, as discussed in detail earlier in this report (see section 5.4, How is OiRA assessed?), the users of the OiRA tools, regardless of their seniority, found them useful in pointing them to safety and health risks, especially those that might have been overlooked in workplaces, such as risks related to lighting, ventilation, air quality, arrangement of items in shelves and others.

In addition, even in workplaces with an advanced OSH framework, its questions and proposed measures have still been reported as useful, as they probed OSH professionals to think about additional risks and measures.

As one interviewee noted:

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

Safety, health and quality manager, healthcare, medical research and education sector (OiRA tool for office work)

Have the companies implemented measures proposed by OiRA?

For the most part, the interview sample included companies that reported using OiRA as a tool to complement their own RAs, which were conducted in-house or with the help of an external consultant. The statements and proposed measures from OiRA were therefore primarily used to verify that there were no important omissions in these RAs. However, the small number of businesses that used OiRA as their main tool to perform the RA reported implementing its proposed measures.

6 Conclusions and key pointers

This study interviewed 24 establishments including OSH professionals in Cyprus, and administered a relevant survey, to provide qualitative research insights into the process of RAs with OiRA in the country. The study was based on convenience sampling and relied on larger enterprises that were more responsive to interview requests. The findings are therefore not representative of all OiRA users in Cyprus and must be interpreted with caution, as they might be skewed towards the preferences of larger companies. The original idea of OiRA is however to support micro and small companies, which generally tend to have a lower awareness and expertise with regard to OSH and RA.

Despite the limitations to the methodology as noted in section 4.2, Categories and analytical lenses, of this report, the number of interviews enabled the identification of common patterns across the data, and no major new insights appeared to emerge from additional interviews. This suggests that a wide range of opinions have been captured, achieving theoretical saturation (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000).

The study focused on **four points of inquiry**: (1) the motivations, sources of information and challenges that businesses in Cyprus face with regard to conducting RAs with OiRA; (2) how businesses make use of the OiRA tools; (3) how they assess them, and finally; (4) what are the tools' potential areas of development in the future.

Motivations, sources of information and challenges that businesses in Cyprus face with regard to conducting RAs with OiRA

With regard to the first point of inquiry, the study found that **legal compliance** remains the primary driver for RAs in Cyprus. In the interviewed group, a growing recognition of the **strategic importance of safety and health was reported**, particularly in larger enterprises and among younger workers. The study also found that the most common **limitations** to implementing measures resulting from the RAs are **budget constraints** and **potential delays in operations**, while the most common **drivers** are **workplace culture** that promotes safety and health and encouraging workers to take **ownership** of these areas. The study further looked at whether the **COVID-19** pandemic impacted the process of RAs, and although its data in this respect was limited, it found that some businesses reprioritised their emphasis towards **biological risks during the pandemic**. To help businesses address those risks, the **DLI** — reported as the key actor promoting OiRA through seminars, workshops and on-site visits, among other means — actively promoted the **COVID-19 OiRA tool**, which saw significant uptake in Cyprus (EU-OSHA, 2023b). As part of the first point of inquiry, the study further looked at the **main motivations** of businesses for using OiRA. In this regard, the study found that the public sector and SMEs used the

OiRA tools for their **cost-free nature**, whereas larger enterprises used them to **enhance** and **verify** their own RAs.

How businesses make use of the OiRA tools

The study found that those organising the RA process in Cypriot establishments were either in-house or external OSH professionals. The study also found that although the approaches to RAs varied between companies, some common elements were also present (see also Figure 7). These included involving workers in RAs both by formal means, such as the safety and health committees, and by informal means, such as casual discussions. Looking specifically at how businesses complete the RA through the OiRA tools, the study found that while the OSH professionals interviewed aimed to use the tools module by module, in some cases they delegated some modules to their colleagues or skipped them and continued them after visiting the workplace to gather the necessary information or after fulfilling competing responsibilities. In general, businesses reported using OiRA once, or whenever a review in the RA needed to be conducted, for example, either as part of a scheduled review or a review following a change in the workplace, in order to sense-check it and assess its completeness. The fact that several users seem to use OiRA as a complementary tool or to check the completeness of their RA done without OiRA also gives new insights into the interpretation of the percentage of companies filling out more than 70% of the tool (top assessments, see also section 3, OiRA in Cyprus). Tools being not completely filled in or finalised might still have served the specific purpose of double-checking content and ensuring that nothing has been overlooked.

How businesses assess the OiRA tools

The study found that the OiRA tools are well regarded in Cyprus, and they are considered as a valuable tool for conducting or supporting RAs, particularly for SMEs, the public sector and those with less experience in the OSH sector. The software of the OiRA tools was found overall intuitive, easy to navigate and reducing barriers to entry for new users. The reported key strengths of OiRA included its references to the relevant legislation, its content quality and free-of-charge nature. The promotion of the OiRA tools by OSH professional to their peers, as well as by academics in OSH-related postgraduate programmes, also attests to the tools' educational value, particularly among new OSH professionals. Simultaneously, reported points of improvement, particularly from larger companies, included challenges related to the non-applicability, repetition and language of some of the tools' questions and the need for further customisation in terms of content, as well as an alignment of outputs with the practices familiar to OSH professionals.

Potential areas for development in the future

Finally, the study found a number of suggestions that could bring benefits for the users in the future, possibly increasing the tools' usability and uptake. These were clarifying OiRA's legal **compliance** with written RA requirements, customising and keeping OiRA tools **up to date** with both the most relevant legislation and trends in a changing nature of work (e.g. telework), more actively **promoting features** like the option for a shared environment where multiple users can have access and providing **training** on their use.

6.1 Key pointers

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, recommendations can be formulated to guide OiRA national partners in effectively assisting companies in optimising OiRA's use and generating ideas for the tool's overall improvement.

- The DLI could provide clear guidance on whether RAs using the OiRA tool can help establishments to ensure legal compliance, and if so, under which circumstances. This is important in a context where legal compliance remains the key driver for businesses to develop a written RA and could be a decisive factor in whether they choose to use OiRA. If the tools cannot be used for RAs, their main objectives should be communicated to businesses using clear and transparent messaging.

- To maintain the relevance of the OiRA tools, it is recommended that the tools continue to be kept up to date with the latest legislation and the risks emerging from a changing world of work.²⁷ An example in this context is remote work and teleworking, which became more prevalent following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The interviews revealed that there might sometimes be lack of awareness around the different features of the OiRA tools. In this context, it might be worth further promoting and providing guidance to users regarding the OiRA tool features, such as those enabling multiple users within the same organisation to access and edit an RA. Additionally it might be worth looking into enabling other features, such as the OSH Services feature that provides the possibility to cooperate on an RA with an external OSH service as well as getting the OSH Service's approval on the specific RA.
- Considering the recent revisions in the Cypriot law that require members of ESYPP to receive formal training in safety and health (MLSI, 2021), OiRA could potentially play a role in this training by making use of training possibilities that the OiRA software provides.
- It is recommended to revisit the tools' initial risk statements to ensure that they are clear to users, irrespective of their OSH experience, as difficulties in answering these initial questions might discourage participants from continuing with the rest of the RA.
- Enhancing — as far as possible — the customisation capabilities of OiRA could improve its versatility and usefulness among users with different preferences and those who work across different industries. In this regard, it might be worth looking into making more use of technical features for structuring OiRA tools, like optional modules and using more often the 'not applicable' as an option for answering statements.
- In terms of OiRA tool development, negative statements should be phrased carefully to make sure they can possibly refer to a range of situations for softening the impression the dichotomy of the two answering possibilities of the statements gives and ensuring that users better identify with the negative statements.
- Campaigns targeting specific sectors as well as hands-on training on how to use the OiRA tools might contribute to further increasing awareness amongst the potential users.

²⁷ It is worth noting that the DLI regularly updates the OiRA tools, as necessary. See also: Table 2.

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