

# Risk assessment using OiRA at Slovenian workplaces – a qualitative study

National Report

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## List of abbreviations

List of abbreviations used in the report	
AUVA	Austrian General Accident Insurance Institute
IT	Information technology
KIM-PP	Key Indicator Method - Pushing/Pulling
MSEs	Micro and small enterprises
OiRA	Online interactive Risk Assessment
OSH	Occupational safety and health
RA	Risk assessment
LI	Lithuanian Inspectorate
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
ZVD	Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and rationale for the study

This report focuses exclusively on Slovenia as part of a broader pan-European study on the use and effectiveness of the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) in workplaces. Building on insights from a qualitative study conducted in France (EU-OSHA, 2023), which highlighted the tool'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 Slovenia'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, 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, Slovenia. Findings from the study aim to inform the overall perception of the implementation of RA processes in Slovenia 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 micro and small enterprises (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 Slovenian OSH context

This chapter provides an overview of Slovenia's 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.

At the national level, OSH-related issues are governed by two ministries: the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities<sup>1</sup> and the Ministry of Health.<sup>2</sup> Both authorities monitor and assess the current situation in the area and draw regulations and solutions for the national regulation of OSH (Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, 2024).

The Labour Inspectorate (LI), overseen by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, controls the implementation of regulations, more specifically, by conducting inspections on workplace conditions, adequacy of equipment, and compliance with occupational medicine regulations (medical examinations of employees).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the LI provides advice and support to workers and employers, communicating with them about OSH issues and protecting workers' rights.

In cooperation with social partners, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities and the LI are responsible for developing OiRA tools in Slovenia.

Several other bodies are also responsible for issues related to OSH:

- The Health Inspectorate performs inspections concerning the implementation of laws and regulations related to all health topics.
- The National Institute of Public Health (Nacionalni inštitut za javno zdravje)<sup>4</sup> monitors the healthcare system, and prepares, analyses and proposes measures to improve the availability, performance and development priorities of the healthcare system (identifies potential health threats, assesses risks and prepares measures for health protection).
- The Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia (Zavod za zdravstveno zavarovanje Slovenije)<sup>5</sup> takes care of the compulsory health insurance and the Institute of Pension and Invalidity Insurance of Slovenia (Zavod za pokojninsko in invalidsko zavarovanje Slovenije)<sup>6</sup> is a provider of mandatory pension and disability insurance.
- The professional associations (several are active in Slovenia) increase awareness of the importance of OSH. The association that unites safety practitioners and occupational physicians is the Chamber of Health and Safety at Work (Zbornica varnosti in zdravja pri delu).<sup>7</sup>

In principle, there are two consultative bodies on OSH-related aspects on the national level:

- The Council of Health and Safety at Work (Svet za varnost in zdravje pri delu). It is an advisory body of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities. The council discusses current issues and adopts recommendations on the states' strategy, joint policy implementation and OSH protection priorities.
- The Economic and Social Council (Ekonomsko socialni svet), where workers, employers and government are equally represented.

At the sectoral level, cross-industry and sectoral collective agreements are concluded by sectoral trade unions and sectoral employers' organisations on all matters concerning conditions at work and employment in those sectors.

Social dialogue is also carried out at the company level. On a company level, it occurs between the management/employer representation and the trade union. It is regulated by the Health and Safety Act, which determines the employers' obligations, no matter the company size, to allow workers to discuss all issues related to OSH. A workplace council or an OSH representative represents the workers in those

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities official website: <https://www.gov.si/en/state-authorities/ministries/ministry-of-labour-family-social-affairs-and-equal-opportunities/>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Health, official website: <https://www.gov.si/en/state-authorities/ministries/ministry-of-health/>

<sup>3</sup> Labour Inspectorate, About the Inspectorate webpage: <https://www.gov.si/en/state-authorities/bodies-within-ministries/labour-inspectorate/about-the-inspectorate/>

<sup>4</sup> National Institute of Public Health, official website: <https://nijz.si/>

<sup>5</sup> Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia, official website: <https://www.zzs.si/en/>

<sup>6</sup> Institute of Pension and Invalidity Insurance of Slovenia, official website: <https://www.zpiz.si/cms/?ids=home2020en>

<sup>7</sup> Chamber of Health and Safety at Work, official website: <https://zbornica-vzd.si/>

instances. If these bodies or functions — council or OSH representative — were not appointed, the employer must consult OSH issues directly with all workers.

The most important national programme related to OSH is ‘The Resolution on the National Programme for Health and Safety at Work 2018-2027’, adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia on 27 March 2018 (National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2018).

Regarding RA, this programme acknowledges the fundamental role of RA documents in occupational health. It mentions, for example, the further support of implementing RA processes by ‘preparation of practical guidelines for RAs taking into account the diversity of workers - especially taking into account differences in terms of gender, age and reduced working capacity, as well as the specific risks to which migrant workers are exposed’. In this context, the **programme also references OiRA, stating the intent to develop OiRA tools that consider the specific risks certain groups of workers face**. The programme also includes a **strategic objective of preparing and implementing a separate programme to create more OiRA tools, update and promote the existing ones, train employers to work with them and establish a user help desk**.

## 2.1 Legal framework

OSH in Slovenia is principally governed by the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which came into force in 2011 (National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2011). The main objective of this act was to simplify the regulations and include modern developments while maintaining the basic concept of health and safety at work in Slovenia. It also incorporates European legislation into Slovenian law.<sup>8</sup>

The Occupational Safety and Health Act applies to all employers (employing at least one person) and to all types of workers and establishments (i.e. public and private). According to the legislation, each employer must ensure health and safety at work, including:

- prevention, elimination and control of risks at work,
- training and information for workers,
- appropriate organisation of work processes,
- provide needed material resources, and
- make a written statement of the risks to which workers are exposed or could be exposed at work (Article 17, National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2011)

This written statement is further referred to as a Safety Statement. The Occupational Safety and Health Act enumerates the necessary elements of written RA, that is:

- identification or detection of danger;
- determination of which of the workers could be exposed to the identified risks;
- RA, in which the probability of accidents at work, occupational diseases or work-related diseases and the severity of their consequences are taken into account;
- decision on whether the risk is acceptable; and
- the decision to introduce measures to reduce unacceptable risk.

As such, in principle, a Safety Statement is a written document that should be prepared after conducting the RA. A Safety Statement should (according to the nature and scope of activities undertaken at the workplace) in particular:

- include a plan for implementing the prescribed requirements and measures;
- include a plan and procedures for implementing measures in cases of imminent danger;
- define the duties and responsibilities of OSH-responsible persons (appointed by the employer) and workers to ensure workplace safety and health (see an example of the title page of a Safety Statement in Box 1).

<sup>8</sup> Directive 89/391/EEC - OSH “Framework Directive” on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work and Directive 2006/123/EC on services in the internal market (Council Directive 1989; European Parliament and of the Council 2006)

## Box 1. Scope of Safety Statement

### Example of the structure of the Safety Statement

We declare that based on the risk assessment, which is an integral part of this statement, we accept the programme proposed in the risk assessment to fulfil the requirements of the regulations on safety and health at work and to reduce the risks and harmfulness identified in the assessment to the minimum possible extent. The necessary professional help and resources will be provided for the successful implementation of the programme.

Company name, signature, date and stamp:

*Source: Ecorys based on the Occupational Health and Safety Act from 2011 and findings from scoping interviews*

The employer must also attach the record of consultation with workers or their representatives to the Safety Statement and specify special health requirements that workers must meet for specific work, in the work process, or for the use of certain work equipment based on the professional assessment of occupational medicine practitioners. Such a record needs to include names of worker representatives (either trade union members or workers selected for the RA) and indicate that they are familiar with the scope of RA conducted within the company. The record concludes with an official agreement on the decided measures to follow up on the RA.

#### ▪ Legal requirement for education to conduct valid RA

At the company level, OSH-related tasks are delivered by designated persons who possess specific professional OSH knowledge.

In line with Article 28 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, at the company level, the employer is primarily responsible for ensuring the health and safety of their workers (National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2011).

To do that, employers must designate one or more OSH experts among their workers (*strokovni delavec*) to perform the tasks related to ensuring workplace safety. **Such an expert must meet conditions determined by the minister responsible for labour**, depending on the type of activity of the employer and the type and level of risks for accidents at work, occupational diseases and diseases related to the work performed. The employer must then determine the number of such experts and the type of professional education they must acquire.

Following the act, the internal OSH expert must produce the technical basis for the Safety Statement and perform periodic assessments of risks in the working environment (Article 29, National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2011).

At the same time, the employer may entrust all or individual tasks of organising and ensuring safety at work to external service providers, given that they **are licensed to perform such services**, when an employer cannot secure the delivery of those tasks internally. External OSH expert services (*zunanja strokovna služba*) are legal entities or individual persons with a **valid permit from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities to perform professional tasks in the field of OSH**, who are authorised by the employer to carry out all or some of those tasks at a particular workplace. The scope of their tasks is the same as that of the internal OSH experts.

In principle, as legally required, a person tasked to provide the OSH services at the workplace (including the RA), either internal or external, must **possess the required expertise certified by the examination**.

Further, the Worker Participation in Management Act (National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, 2007) determines the methods and conditions for workers' participation in companies' management decisions. In the context of employee participation in OSH matters, the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) 2019 results highlight that only 13% of respondents reported discussing OSH-related issues in staff meetings, the lowest in all EU Member States (EU-OSHA, 2019a). On the other hand, 50% of Slovenian ESENER respondents stated that controversies related to OSH



arise during OSH-related discussions between employee representatives and management, which may suggest relatively informal ways of discussing OSH issues, including RA (EU-OSHA, 2019b).

## 2.2 Description of tools and approaches used for RA other than OiRA

### ▪ The role of OSH services

Due to legislation and historical reasons, external OSH service providers are widespread and play an important role within the Slovenian OSH landscape.

According to the results of ESENER 2019, **the share of employers using internal OSH services is the lowest in the EU** (10%; EU-OSHA, 2022, p. 25). The activity of OSH services provided to employers in Slovenia requires permission from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities responsible for work. To this end, the ministry runs the **online registry of licensed specialists, which is publicly available and currently includes around 250 OSH-specialised companies**. Most of these are companies with one or two employees. Most external OSH experts are not specialised, meaning they do not have particular expertise applicable to one sector only but that they provide OSH services for all activities. Usually, larger companies with more than 500 employees have their own internal OSH experts, but they also often cooperate with external OSH experts in providing particular OSH tasks.

### ▪ RA tools other than OiRA

Scoping interviews, interviews with external experts and companies, and desk research did not reveal the availability of many tools in Slovenia for RA. However, a few were mentioned and are listed and described below.

Several interviewees mentioned the popularity of the Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (ZVD) method. The requirement to conduct RAs did not exist in Slovenian legislation until 1999. As a result, there was not much knowledge or documentation in this area. At that time, the ZVD developed its own RA method. The ZVD method is an offline checklist type of assessment. Most OSH experts started using the ZVD method, also because of a limited availability of alternatives. The ZVD method has thus taken root among both OSH experts and employers. All in all, this familiarity has resulted in a situation where any change in the method used requires a greater engagement with those involved in the RA process, which often discourages experts and employers alike from using alternative methods.

Another method that was often used by interviewees was AUVA. The AUVA method, originally developed by the Austrian General Accident Insurance Institute (AUVA), is a structured approach used to assess and evaluate risks in the workplace. This method involves calculating the Level of Risk, which is defined as the product of the probability of an unsafe event occurring (Risk Probability) and the rank of the possible severity of the consequences (Risk Severity; Stanković & Stanković, 2013).

As of August 2023, new legislation called 'Rules on ensuring the safety and health of workers when moving loads manually' specified the employers' obligations to conduct RAs in manual handling (Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, 2023). To facilitate RA compliance in the area, the Key Indicator Method - Pushing/Pulling (KIM-PP) methodology was recommended. KIM-PP was developed by the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Germany (BAuA).<sup>9</sup> The recommended method includes the different postures that could be relevant for work performance and indication for the frequency of different postures/positions, and combining this information allows for quantification of the severity of the risk. The KIM-PP has been translated into Slovenian. However, for the sake of completeness it has to be highlighted that the KIM-PP method is not a tool that can be used for a complete RA but only for a specific part of the RA concentrating on manual handling.

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<sup>9</sup> BAuA, *Risk Assessment with the Key Indicator Methods (KIM)*, website: <https://www.baua.de/EN/Topics/Work-design/Risk-assessment/Key-indicator-method>

### 3 OiRA in Slovenia

OiRA tools were developed in Slovenia in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, the Labour Inspectorate and social partners, including trade unions and employers' associations. The main national motivation to join OiRA was to provide an easy, free-of-charge method available to Slovenian MSEs to take care of their RA internally.

Initially, the ministry decided to develop a tool for office work since various sectors could benefit from this. Further sectoral OiRA tools were developed in close cooperation with social partners. A couple of OiRA tools have been developed in cooperation with Slovenia's Association of Employers in Craft and Small Business. Table 1 provides an overview of the available tools (as of drafting this report) and the date of publishing.

**Table 1. OiRA sectoral tools in Slovenia – date of publication**

Sector	Date of publication
Office work	2014
Hairdressers	
Road transport	
Carpentries	
Cleaning	2015
Construction	
Motor vehicles repair	September 2016
Painter	
Wholesale & retail trade	
Bakeries	October 2016
Butcher	
Electricians	
Vehicle tyres repair	November 2016
Roofers	
Metal workers	
Parquet workers	
Cooks	
Journalists	May 2020
Educational establishments	
Cafes, restaurant, catering	
COVID-19	November 2020
Warehouse workers	August 2022

Source: Ecorys based on the information provided by EU-OSHA and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities

#### 3.1 Main promotional approaches to OiRA

The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities carried out OiRA promotional activities, mainly in educational workshops/seminars and cooperating with employers' organisations and trade unions. Additionally, the ministry organises workshops regularly every year for representatives of OSH services and establishments, where information about OiRA tools is provided.

Guides on how to use OiRA tools are also available on the websites of entrepreneurial organisations, such as the online guide on the interactive tool for RA at work published by the Chamber of Commerce

and Industry of Slovenia (Gospodarska zbornica Slovenija; Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, 2016).

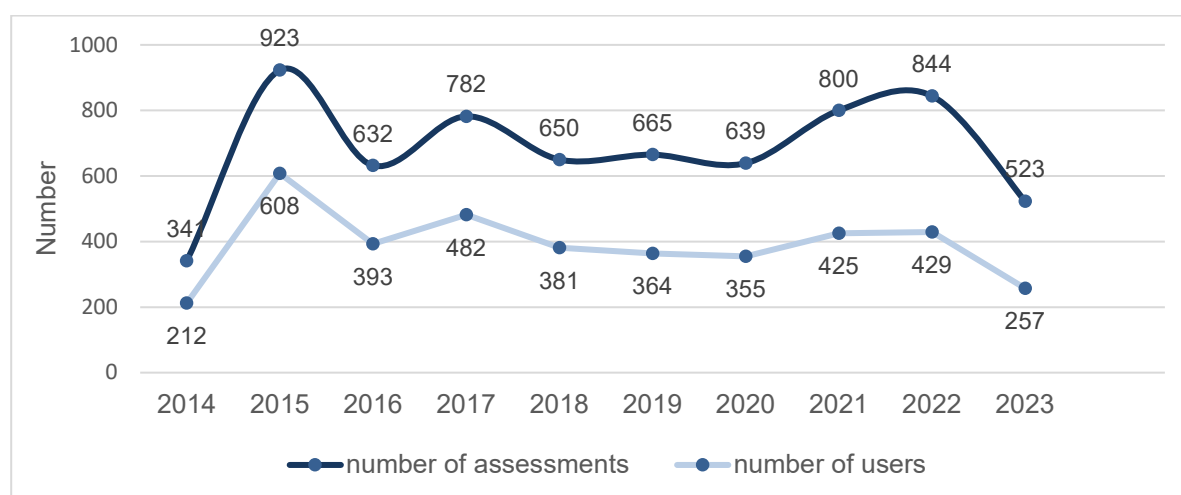
## 3.2 Use of OiRA tools

Background information on OiRA tools is available on the [EU-OSHA](#) and the [Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities](#) websites.

The Slovenian ministry signed an OiRA memorandum with EU-OSHA in November 2012. Official work on the tool developments started the same year. The first tools went live in 2014. As shown in Figure 1, in 2015 the number of new users was 608, followed by a slight decrease and stabilisation at the level of 350-480 new users annually in the next years. In 2023, the number of new users dropped to 257.

At the end of August 2024, the total number of OiRA assessments reached 6,569, carried out by 4,135 users. Similarly to the number of users, the highest number of RAs was carried out in 2015 (923), followed by a slight decrease in the following years. In 2021 and 2022, the annual number of new assessments conducted was 800 and 844, respectively. These high numbers also result from the publication of a tool to prevent COVID-19 infections in the workplace in 2020. As in the number of new users in 2023 there was also drop in new assessments (375).

Figure 1. Number of new users and new assessments started per year



Source: Ecorys, based on OiRA Metabase<sup>10</sup>

There is a mild seasonality in users' registration. The highest numbers of users are usually registered in spring and autumn, and the lowest in summer months.

Out of all assessments carried out over time by any Slovenian user, 44.3% were completed to more than 70% (top assessments), and 46.1% had low completion (less than 10% of risks answered). The remaining 9.5% answered between 10% and 70% of all statements (OiRA Metabase).

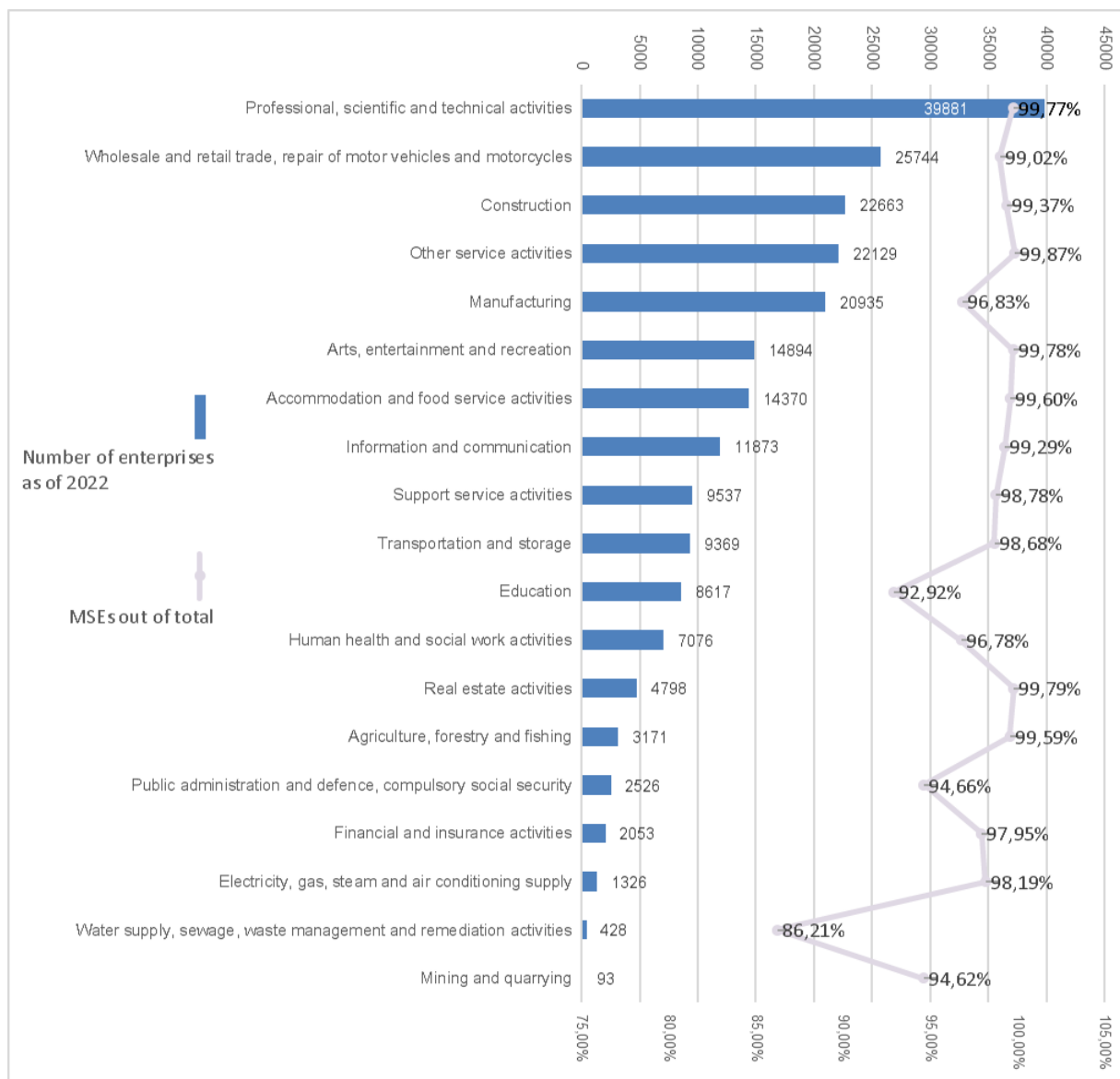
### 3.2.1 An overview of OiRA use in particular sectors

Before looking at the number of users and assessments of tools, it is important to highlight that these numbers alone do not define the success of a tool. Tools have to be looked at in light of the number of MSEs in a specific sector in the country, a figure that is not always available. Also, some tools refer to more than one sector and, as such, have a broader range, such as the office work tool. Figure 2 presents Slovenia's number of economic entities as of 2022 (the latest data available) in respect to sectoral counts, as well as percentages of MSEs in each sector. However, as mentioned, these do not directly overlap

<sup>10</sup> Accessed on 9 September 2024.

with the target group for a specific OiRA tool, for example, a construction tool focusing on roofers will only cover a small part of the overall number of all companies in the much broader construction sector. Importantly, while the percentage slightly differs by sectors, **the majority of Slovenian companies, as of 2022, were micro-enterprises (1-9 employees, 94.88%), followed by small-size enterprises (10-49 employees, 3.9%).**

**Figure 2. Number of enterprises and percentage of MSEs per sector (NACE Rev. 2) in 2022**



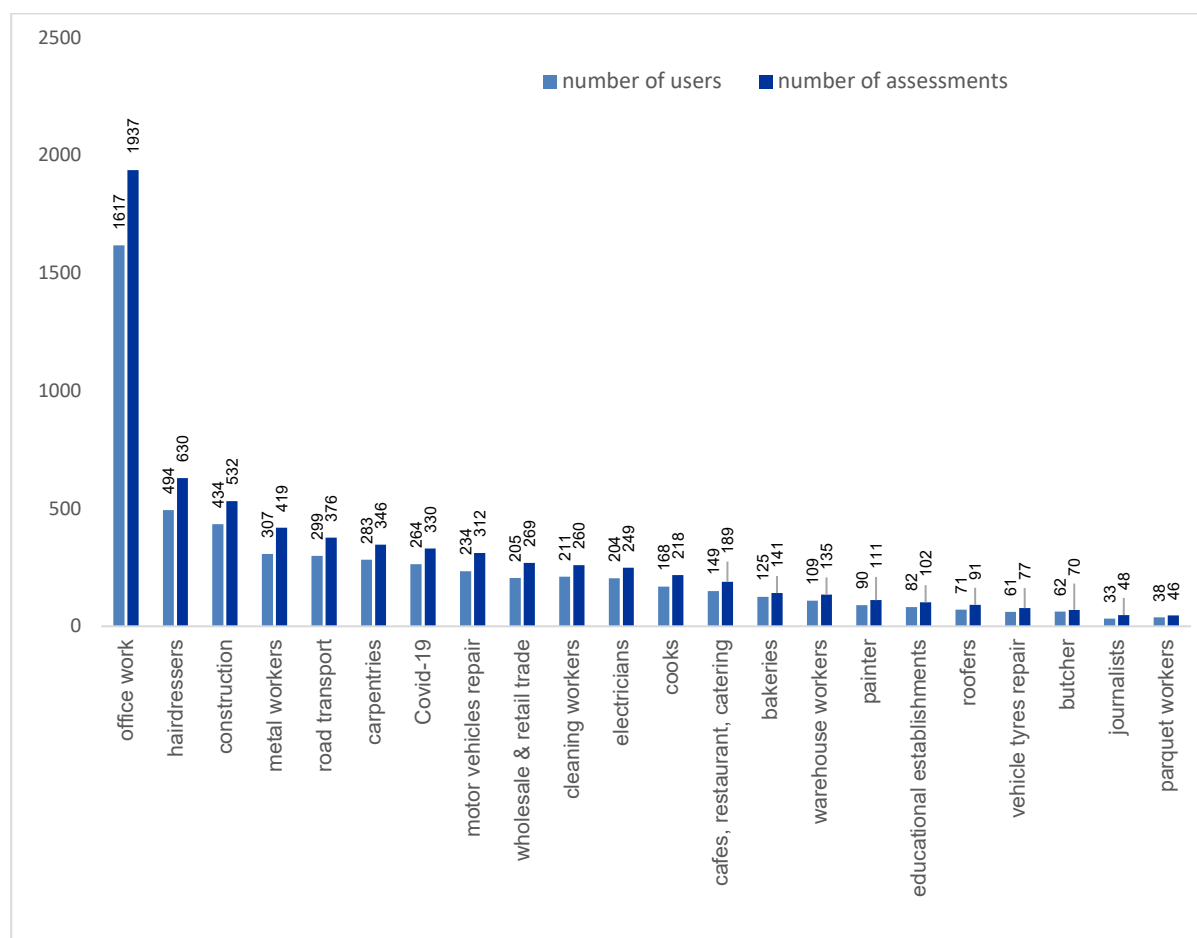
Source: Ecorys' own calculation based on the Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office (Statistical Office, 2022)

The data show that most of the enterprises are in the sectors of professional, scientific and technical activities (18% of all 221,483 enterprises), wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (11.6%), and construction (10.2%). The smallest number of enterprises were active in sectors of mining and quarrying and utilities and waste management sectors.

The use of OiRA varies across the tools (Figure 3). The tool for **office work was used by the largest number of users**, reaching over 1,600 (29.3% of all Slovenian OiRA users) and over 1,900 assessments carried out (28.6%). This high level of usage corresponds with the previously mentioned

statistics, indicating that this tool can benefit the sector with the largest number of entities (professional, scientific and technical activities) but might also be used in other sectors (since most companies also have an office workplace). The next most often used tools were for hairdressers (494 users, 630 assessments) and workers in construction (434 users, 532 assessments). Other tools used by a larger number of users were road transportation tools, metal works and carpentry tools.

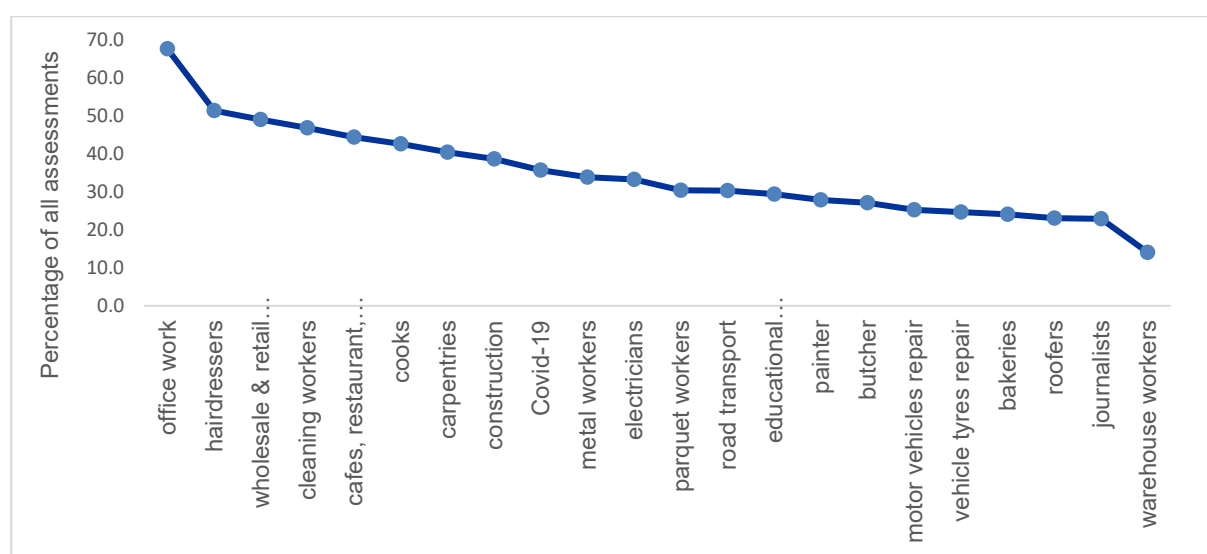
**Figure 3. Number of users and assessments per sectoral tools**



Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase<sup>11</sup>

The tools also varied by the completion level. The analysis presented in Figure 4 shows the percentage of top RAs by tool (more than 70% answered). OiRA for **office work has by far the highest share of top completed assessments**.

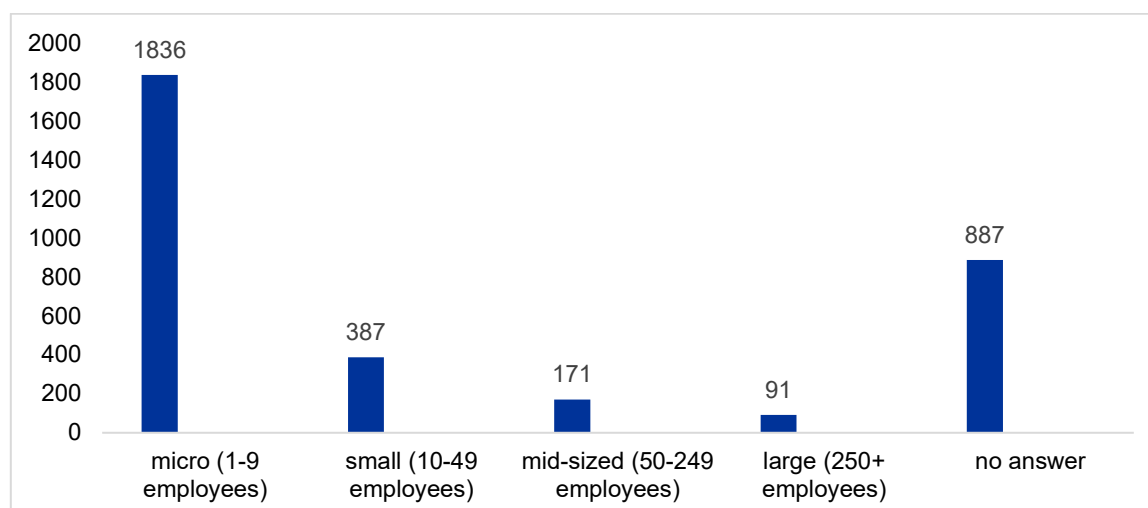
<sup>11</sup> Accessed 9 September 2024.

**Figure 4. Share of top assessments (more than 70% answered) in the OiRA tools in Slovenia**

Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2.2 Profile, and experiences of the companies using OiRA

A voluntary questionnaire embedded in the OiRA software provided some more answers on demographical and other aspects from users. Please note that numbers/percentages here only refer to the number of users who answered this questionnaire and not to the overall amount of users. The OiRA tools would seem to reach the relevant target audience in Slovenia, as 54% of users stated being micro-enterprises (1,836 out of 3,372). 11.5% stated they were small enterprises and 5% were medium-sized. Large companies accounted for the minority of the sample, with 3% of responses, as presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5. Profile of companies using OiRA, number of employees in the companies**

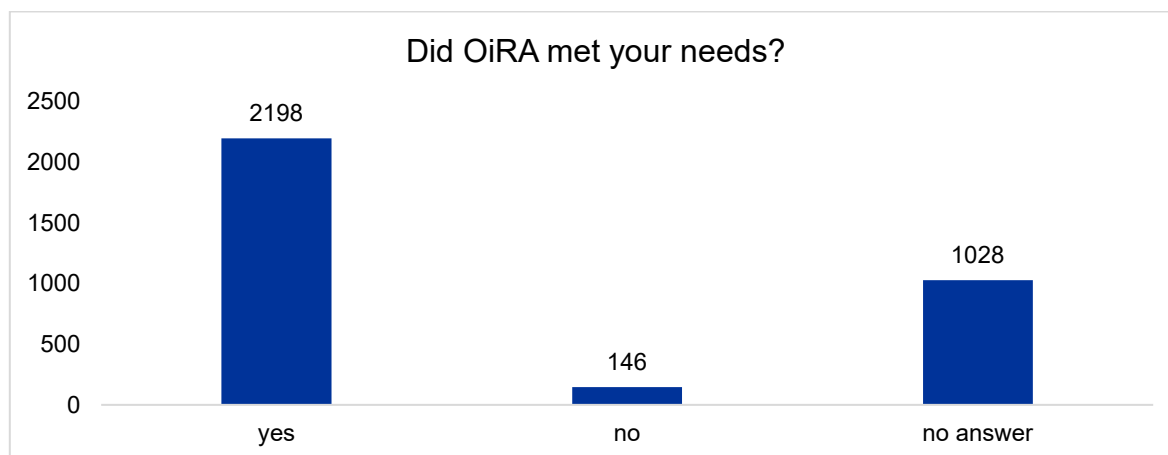
Source: Ecorys based on OiRA Metabase<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Accessed on 9 September 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Accessed on 26 September 2024.

Considering those statistics, it is important to recognise that because of a high reliance on external OSH providers in Slovenia, it is not clear whether the statistics above relate to the companies that were producing the RAs (external providers) or to those for whom the RA was produced (the provider's clients). Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents to OiRA's voluntary questionnaire found that it responded to their needs, with only 4.3% stating that it did not, and a high number not answering this question altogether (see also Figure 6 for the number of responses).

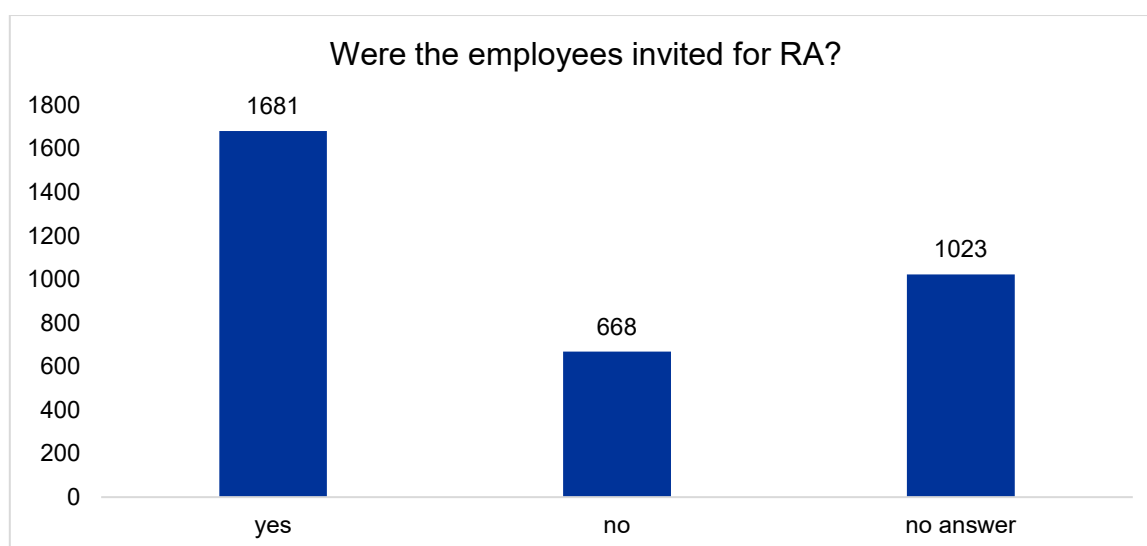
**Figure 6. Users' feedback on OiRA meeting their needs**



Source: Ecorys, based on OiRA Metabase<sup>14</sup>

As Figure 7 indicates, half of the respondents stated that employees were invited to participate in the RA using OiRA. However, 20% reported that employees were not involved, and 30% did not provide an answer altogether.

**Figure 7. Employees involvement in RA using OiRA**



Source: Ecorys, based on OiRA Metabase<sup>15</sup>

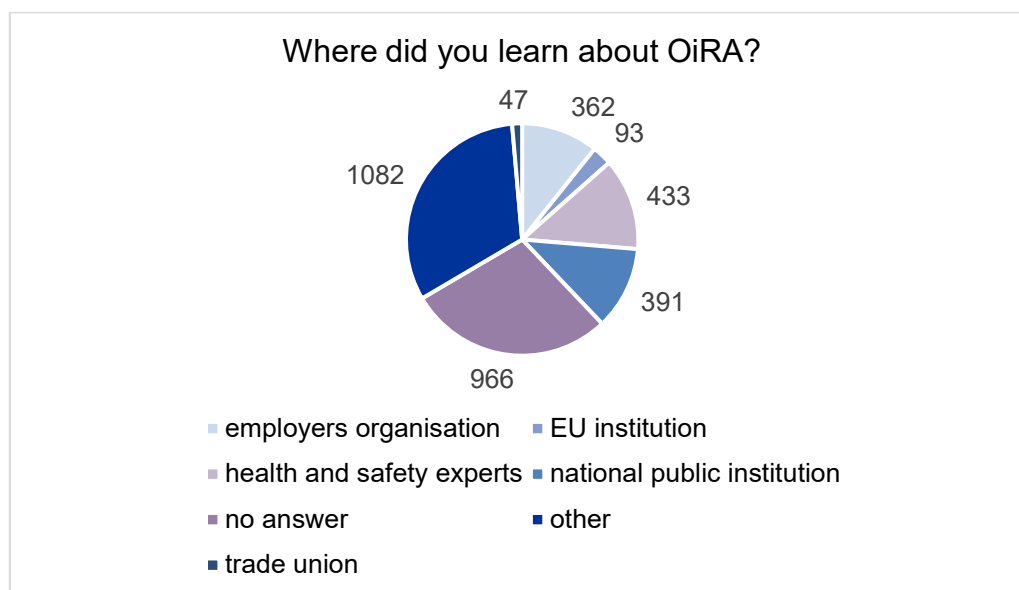
<sup>14</sup> Accessed on 26 September 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Accessed on 26 September 2024.

### 3.2.3 Awareness around OiRA

For the question on where the respondents learned about OiRA, 29% provided no answer. About one-third of respondents indicated that they found out about OiRA from non-specified other sources. This was followed by 13% reporting that they learned about OiRA from health and safety experts, 12% from national public institutions, presumably the Labour Inspectorate or the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, and 11% from employers' organisations. The minority indicated that they found out about OiRA from EU institutions (3%) or trade unions (1%).

Figure 8. Sources of information about OiRA



Source: Ecorys, based on OiRA Metabase<sup>16</sup>

## 4 Methodology, challenges and adjustments to this study

This section outlines the methodological approaches, challenges encountered and mitigation strategies employed throughout this study. The research was conducted between September 2023 and June 2024, with the fieldwork phase (including interviews) conducted from October 2023 to June 2024.

### 4.1 Key data collection methods

This study employed three primary data collection methods:

- scoping interviews with relevant national stakeholders: national OiRA partner, LI, trade union and employers' organisation to understand the specific OSH landscape in Slovenia and grasp OiRA tools' role in RA practice;
- in-depth interviews with OSH external experts who used OiRA tools in their work with clients;
- in-depth interviews with direct OiRA users; and
- desk research to complement findings in the interviews, especially relevant to regulatory requirements.

To conduct the in-depth interviews — the main focus of this study — a tailored interview guide for a semi-structured interview was used for all the interviews with individuals performing the RA (both using

<sup>16</sup> Accessed on 26 September 2024.



and not using OiRA — as will be further detailed in subsequent sections). As the interviewees within the sample all used OiRA to some degree, the option to use one questionnaire, tailored as necessary during the interview, was the most appropriate. Practical considerations dictated that interviews were conducted in Slovenian. Remote interviews were facilitated through MS Teams, and all write-ups were completed in English to streamline the report-writing process.

## 4.2 Recruitment and sampling

As in the other countries included in the study, the sample was intended to comprise OiRA users (from establishments/companies) and non-OiRA users (users of different online and offline approaches). However, as advised by the national OiRA partner, the study was tailored to include OSH service providers due to their significant role in carrying out RAs in Slovenia.

A recruitment survey was created and displayed on the national OiRA partner's websites and by other organisations. Additionally, information about the study was circulated via professional OSH organisation newsletters and presented at several in-person OSH events conducted by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities and the LI. Recruitment was also carried out based on contacts from a database from the national OiRA partner, which was shared and used strictly in line with data protection regulations. Additionally, information about the study was circulated via a newsletter feature in the OiRA software, which allows to send general messages to OiRA users who had actively agreed to receive such information.

Finally, as recruitment continued to be a challenge, marketing research companies were contacted to support the recruitment process. However, due to the narrow sample required for the study (OiRA users or users of other RA tools/methods), none of the companies contacted by the marketing research company fitted into the required profile.

## 4.3 Categories and analytical lenses

The analysis applied within this report is shaped by the broader consideration of how OSH services are provided and regulated in Slovenia:

- **The analysis considers especially the role of external OSH service providers**, which usually support companies in their RA, as evidenced by the fact that only 10% of employers in Slovenia use internal OSH services (EU-OSHA, 2022). In Slovenia, therefore, the externalisation of OSH services has become a defining feature of RA processes. This statistic is mirrored in the research sample, where most interviewees were OSH service providers who responded to the interview questions based on their overall experience with OiRA in various companies. Individuals using OiRA for internal purposes were also interviewed, although this group was smaller.
- **As a consequence of the role of external OSH service providers**, the analysis relies heavily on the secondary perspective of OSH external experts and on their experiences working with companies. Where possible and relevant, however, the report refers to direct OiRA users who were also interviewed for this study.
- Given the complex nature of OiRA users in Slovenia, the report focuses on the **different ways in which OiRA tools were used** to support RA. For these reasons, the report divides the analysis to grasp the dynamics of OiRA tools used as stand-alone tools (see section 6.3.1, OiRA as a stand-alone RA tool) and OiRA tools used to supplement other RA methods (see section 6.3.2, OiRA tools complementary to other RA methods).
- OiRA tools in Slovenia include those developed for specific sectors (such as OiRA for Constructions) and for specific areas/professions (such as OiRA for Cooks and OiRA for Painters). When considering the feedback from users, it should be noted that in the case of the **OiRA tools for areas/professions, they cover a very narrow scope of activities**, which often might fit well when tools are used to supplement other RAs. On the contrary, **OiRA tools developed for sectors have broader applicability**.

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

Most of the respondents in the sample — seven interviewees — were OSH experts providing their services for different companies, that is, in different sectors and with differing numbers of employees. A smaller portion were the representatives of companies that conducted the RAs (or parts of them) internally. All of the interviewees were users of OiRA to a degree, dictated by the needs of the companies to which they were delivering services or by the companies in which they were employed.

Table 2 summarises the sample, indicating whether the interviewee was delivering RA using OiRA internally, in the company of their employment (direct OiRA user), or as an external OSH service provider (uses OiRA with/for their clients) and which OiRA tools were used by the interviewee.

**Table 2. Summary of the study sample**

No	External/internal	Context	OiRA tools used
1	<b>OSH external expert</b>	occupational medicine doctor and IT specialist, using OiRA with their clients	Most of OiRA tools
2	<b>OSH external expert</b>	using OiRA with their clients	Vehicles - Car & heavy loads vehicles repair
3	<b>OSH external expert</b>	using OiRA with their clients	COVID-19
4	<b>OSH external expert</b>	using OiRA with their clients	COVID-19, Painters, Cleaning
5	<b>OSH external expert</b>	using OiRA with their clients	Not specified - only for educational purposes
6	<b>OSH external expert</b>	using OiRA with their clients	Office work
7	<b>OSH external expert</b>	assessor for ISO 45001, using OiRA with their clients	Office work, Wholesale & retail trade, Cleaning, Hairdressers, Road transport
8	<b>Direct OiRA users</b>	internal OSH expert, caregivers and care facility company	Educational establishment (elements of Hairdressers and Wholesale & retail trade tools)
9	<b>Direct OiRA user</b> , owner of a safety company	internal OSH expert	Office work
10	<b>Direct OiRA user</b>	company operating in the area of port activities	COVID-19

Source: Ecorys, based on interviews

## 5 Motivations for and challenges to systematic RA

### 5.1 What are the motivations?

According to interviewees, the primary reasons for conducting systematic RA in Slovenia are to **adhere to legal requirements, avoid penalties from labour inspectors and avoid the possible legal consequences of accidents** if a RA was not appropriately conducted. This latter reason was mentioned by six external OSH experts and one direct OiRA user. Consequently, in the opinion of two external service providers, most companies view RA as a necessary effort, which they would like to keep minimal, to meet regulatory requirements. Interestingly, one of the interviewees — an external service provider who previously used OiRA for the automotive sector — pointed out that this may also be coupled with fear of consequences in the event of an accident, especially if the safety compliance rules had not been followed.

While following the law is the main reason reported for conducting the RA, four OSH external experts stated that they are also aware of companies taking RAs more seriously and proactively, **going beyond this minimal legal compliance. However, such instances were indicated as being rare.** At the same time, two direct OiRA users who were delivering RA in the companies in which they were employed claimed that conducting the RA is part of their approach to generally increasing workplace safety. Nevertheless, even in those instances, legal compliance was the main driver for conducting an RA.

## 5.2 What are the challenges?

The interviewees highlighted **some challenges in systematically implementing RAs and safety procedures** in Slovenia. These include a lack of OSH awareness and understanding of OSH concepts and a reliance on OSH experts.

The interviewees identified the most common challenge for conducting systemic RAs as a **widespread lack of awareness and understanding of what an RA entails** and what purpose it serves (other than mere legal compliance). This challenge was mentioned by almost all interviewees (both external and internal experts), with many sharing the opinion that smaller companies, in particular, struggle with this perception. As one interviewee observed, the role of OSH experts is crucial in addressing these challenges.

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*Employers have no idea what RA is, what it looks like, what they have to do; they learn from somewhere that they need to have a RA, but they don't know how to do it themselves.*

**External OSH service provider for the healthcare sector (unspecified OiRA tools)**

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As the interviewees mentioned, this lack of understanding is not limited to smaller businesses; even medium-sized companies may lack this detailed knowledge of when and how RAs should be updated. One interviewee, who provides services for companies of different sizes and sectors, noted: 'We primarily work with medium-sized companies that are aware of the necessity of having RAs and revising them when changes occur ... However, they lack detailed knowledge of when exactly RAs should be updated.'

It was indicated, here in particular by the external service providers interviewed, that companies are more willing to externalise RAs since: 'They won't deal with it themselves. They don't know what the RA is for and how to approach it' (interviewee providing services for mostly small companies in the automotive sector), and 'due to the low cost and time efficiency, avoiding the need to waste time and energy on RA development' (interviewee providing services to companies of different sizes and in different sectors). The externalisation of RAs was considered time-saving and filled the companies' OSH/RA expertise gap. **Interviews indicated that employers rely heavily on the knowledge of external OSH service providers. They expect those providers to manage OSH procedures and secure compliance independently.** Hence, the requirement to possess up-to-date knowledge of the requirements was transferred to external providers.

However, some interviewees shared that the reliance on external contractors can be challenging, as, for example, **externally produced RAs were viewed as not adjusted to specific companies and workplace risks were not addressed adequately.** Both external and internal experts interviewed mentioned this (with the first group relating this observation to previous experiences of their clients). It was further seconded by the opinion of the interviewee from the Labour Inspectorate, who shared that during the inspections the RA is sometimes found not to be sufficiently tailored to the particular needs of the company. The official statistics confirm this to a degree: according to the 2021 Labour Inspectorate's report, the highest number of violations identified by inspectors was related to assessing risks and preparing the Safety Statement and the RA documentation (32% out of 8,384 violations; Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia, 2021).

For example, one employer shared their opinion on the limitations of the external RA provision by saying:

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*Due to poor quality or too general RA from the external OSH contractor, we decided to make the RA ourselves. The RAs we had done before with externals did not reflect the real situation, and excessive anomalies occurred.*

**Direct OiRA user – OSH specialist in care facility/caregiving sector (educational establishments with elements of hairdressers and wholesale & retail trade tools)**

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Additionally, to a degree, this challenge can also be linked with the already noted perception of RA as a mere bureaucratic requirement with little real value, leading to a focus on minimal legally required compliance rather than a genuine commitment to improved workplace safety.

### 5.3 Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on RAs

As viewed by the interviewees, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on processes and OSH awareness in Slovenia varied significantly across different organisations. The responses generally indicated that COVID-19 heightened awareness and interest in RA/OSH for some, yet the long-term effect was not uniform at all workplaces. At the same time, some interviewees reported that the pandemic had little to no effect in some cases. Overall, **the most common opinion was that after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared to be over, the OSH awareness returned to pre-pandemic levels.**

In instances where COVID-19 was reported to raise employers' awareness of OSH significantly, this was caused by the **direct need to update RAs to address the new risks associated with the virus.** One interviewee in particular indicated the pandemic's high impact on occupational health at their workplace. As a company delivering port activities, their workers were especially exposed to potential virus transmission; in response to this emerging need, they expanded their team to an occupational health physician and an epidemiologist to address the complex challenges posed by the virus. OiRA played an important role in this process, as it served as an accurate source of information on the RA and pandemic-associated risks when no other tools or approaches provided such support (see also section 6.3.1, OiRA as a stand-alone tool).

Further, as some interviewees mentioned, the pandemic **temporarily increased interest in RA, particularly on COVID-19-specific risks.** For example, an external service provider (mainly for the healthcare sector), noted: 'COVID-19 had a positive impact on interest in RA, but only from the perspective of COVID-19', which was seconded by the occupational medicine specialists, who stated that while 'awareness of OSH has remained high even after COVID-19, interest in RA has almost returned to its old level'. Both opinions indicate that while employers were motivated to deal with immediate pandemic-related occupational risk issues, their focus did not necessarily include a long-term commitment to improving OSH practices.

At the same time, some interviewees reported that COVID-19 had little to no impact on their approach to OSH and RA. Interestingly, an external expert delivering services mostly for medium-sized manufacturing companies observed that while the pandemic did not raise the level of OSH awareness, it impacted its **dynamics, resurfacing, for example, the issues related to psychosocial risks.**

## 6 Findings on OiRA tools use

The following chapter first discusses how OiRA is used in practice, highlighting how the interviewed external OSH experts and direct OiRA users use it. Secondly, it looks into specific differences in how OiRA is used as a stand-alone tool and in combination with other tools.

## 6.1 How is OiRA chosen?

**OSH external experts decide what RA tool to use with each client, depending on the client's needs and the company's scope of operation.** As a result, they generally **avoid combining multiple methodologies** due to the complexity and inefficiency this introduces. Instead, they prefer a single methodological approach that meets all requirements, treating OiRA as one of the possible tools in the toolbox.

Firstly, the external OSH experts opt for methodologies that they considered to align more closely with the particular tasks performed and the workplace for which they deliver services (with appropriateness, availability, and up-to-date elements being considered); this meant that for simpler, less hazardous workplaces or tasks (office or administrative work), OiRA was deemed appropriate due to its simplicity and flexibility. On the other hand, for more complex working environments (hazardous substances manual handling, other specialised industry requirements), they opted for tools like AUVA or ZVD.

Secondly, another factor, especially in situations where OiRA was selected for the client, was the overall user friendliness of the tool. OiRA was selected for its user-friendly interface, its step-by-step guidance, its ability to involve workers in the process and its online format, making it more accessible to a broader audience.

At the same time, when OSH external experts selected other methods as the primary tool for RA, they sometimes opted for OiRA to serve as an educational tool or a checklist validating the RA carried out with other methods. These situations are further described in section 6.3.2, which describes how OiRA tools complement other methods.

Lastly, though not discussed directly, the users' personal characteristics may be considered. External OSH service providers, especially those with significant experience, may prefer using specific tools, particularly those they are most familiar with. OiRA's relative novelty status may play a role in its advantages and disadvantages.

**For three direct OiRA users, OiRA tools were selected to meet their specific needs.** One direct OiRA user decided to opt for a combination of different OiRA tools due to the insufficient quality of RA provided to their company by an OSH external expert. Another direct OiRA user looked for the method for independent RA and decided to use OiRA instead of the AUVA method: 'I first made the RA according to the AUVA method, but it was not of good quality, due to insufficient knowledge of the methodology. Later I did a new RA with OiRA'. The last OiRA direct user used OiRA during the pandemic as a checklist to verify compliance with their RA considering the new COVID-19 related risks.

## 6.2 How is RA using OiRA conducted?

### 6.2.1 Who carries out OiRA RA, and how is this organised?

#### ▪ Who is filling in OiRA and why?

The selection of the person responsible for filling in the RA in the OiRA tools was associated with two themes: cooperation of the external expert with the company, and the perceived level of expertise required to carry out the RA.

All external OSH experts indicated that they delivered the RA. Only in a few cases was it mentioned that the employer or a worker conducted the RA using OiRA — those included three direct OiRA users and additional mentions of OSH experts having their clients (directed to OiRA by the service provider) filling out the tool by themselves.

Specifically, four external experts indicated that **OiRA was used in collaboration between OSH experts and employers**. For example, the OSH expert takes the lead in filling out the tool or supports employers in completing it, with the employer providing the necessary input, for example:

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*We use OiRA collaboratively with the employer, where the OSH specialist guides the employer through the OiRA process.*

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**External OSH service provider for various sectors such as public, manufacturing, construction and pharmaceutical (COVID-19 tool)**

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Other external experts (representing, for example, middle-sized manufacturing companies and other diverse unspecified sectors) also mentioned that, for example, the client fills in OiRA by themselves, and they are available to provide clarifications, or they enter the data for the client, simultaneously guiding them through the process.

At the same time, **filling RAs in OiRA tools, in some cases, was associated with the level of expertise required**. In the opinion of two interviewees — external service providers — for small employers in particular the OiRA tool was overwhelming in scope. As reported, they did not have time or willingness to conduct the process themselves, which led to a reliance on experts (see section 4.3, Categories and analytical lenses). Further, as one external provider suggested, even when employers attempted to use OiRA, the process was found to be slow and unappealing, leading employers to involve external experts:

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*When employers attempted to use OiRA themselves, the process was very slow and consequently unappealing to them. ... Usually, we guide them through the entire process and enter the data while the client responds. If the client creates it [RA using OiRA] themselves and only consults us, the process becomes too lengthy, and clients tend to avoid it. ... It is user-friendly enough for OSH professionals, but it is too demanding for those with poor IT literacy.*

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**External OSH service provider for unspecified companies (office work, wholesale & retail trade, cleaning, hairdressers, road transport tools)**

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Additionally, one external expert strongly believed that non-professionals should not deliver RAs as they lack the required expertise. However, other interviewees generally did not share this view. At the same time, this claim is not confirmed by **three direct OiRA users, who did find OiRA RA clear enough to use without a specialised background in OSH**. Notably, one direct OiRA user decided to pursue an RA with OiRA (combined with other methods) after the poor quality of RA provided by an OSH external expert. This actually inspired the direct OiRA user to attain the required qualification and become an OSH expert herself.

#### ▪ **Worker involvement**

While OSH experts cooperate with company representatives to fill in OiRA RA, the results regarding consultation of the broader workforce or worker representatives are less clear. Interview findings indicate that worker involvement is, in certain cases, integrated into the RA process, that there are specific needs for the RA, and, most importantly, that the person conducting the RA makes the individual decision, and no one-size-fits-all solution was adopted.

For some enterprises, interviewees reported worker involvement during workplace audits or discussions, where their feedback is collected to inform the RA process. This involvement usually occurs during the initial data collection or site visit stages. An expert providing services for a wide range of companies (e.g. healthcare, public administration and education sectors), stated that: 'Workers are included during the workplace tour when we ask them about conditions, satisfaction, etc. However, we have no information on how they are included later [in the process of RA]'. Similarly, another interviewee mentioned that different persons within the workplace are differently involved in the RA process:

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*The client prepares job descriptions, we conduct workplace and equipment inspections, and then we create the RA using OiRA. It involves an OSH expert,*

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*HR personnel, and the team/group leader. Workers are involved indirectly during workplace audits or inspections when we also talk to employees.*

**External OSH service provider for the construction and craftsmanship industry (COVID-19, painters, cleaning tools)**

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Another case was particular as the company was conducting the RA internally for COVID-19 specifically as part of the more extensive process, and many people were involved. Here, the involvement of a worker representative was directly mentioned:

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*We used it [OiRA] as an additional source of information. In our case, OSH experts, HR personnel, occupational health physicians, epidemiologists, worker representatives, and department heads were involved. Worker representatives are always involved in RA development at our company, participating in the entire RA creation process.*

**Direct OiRA user – social worker and HR specialist, company engaged in maritime logistics (COVID-19 tool)**

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#### ▪ **How is the RA practically organised and how much time do users need to complete OiRA?**

Regarding the practicalities of the RA, a common structure in how external experts approached the process could be determined. **All RAs start with a visit to the company, gathering information through shopfloor visits, going through the documents prepared at the workplace, and talking with the employer or other relevant persons.** Employers may, for example, guide the OSH experts through a typical working day, then experts choose the appropriate method and complete the RA documentation in a separate step. For interviewed internal specialists, such a process cannot be established since their use of OiRA was quite specific.

The time required to conduct an RA varies depending on the complexity of the task, the tools used, and the level of preparation of the data and information required. Of special importance is that, as discussed, the interviewees do not usually use OiRA as a stand-alone approach. This means that there is a difference between how long it takes to conduct an RA using OiRA alone and how long it takes to conduct an RA based on several different methods.

**When using OiRA, the RA process typically takes a few hours, up to a day (four interviews).** However, if necessary data is missing, the finalisation of the RA may be postponed until the required information is obtained. In cases of more complex assessments related to COVID-19, as was reported by one interviewee, the entire information-gathering process could extend over one week, including inspections and documentation reviews, before completing the RA in one session.

#### ▪ **How do users complete and modify OiRA?**

Many users prefer to complete the RA in one session whenever possible. In such cases, the OiRA questionnaire is tackled in a single, chronological sequence, and the assessment is conducted with the client present to provide immediate input. This approach is typically used for simpler RAs or when data is readily available.

Generally, users follow a systematic approach, often working chronologically through the OiRA modules. However, based on the availability of data and the suitability of each module, the assessment is also conducted flexibly.

A common theme among **external service providers is the selective use of OiRA.**<sup>17</sup> They frequently assess each module's applicability and omit those deemed not to be necessary for their case. 'If we assess that a particular module is not suitable for our case, we skip it' (external service provider for a

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<sup>17</sup> It was also mentioned by the internal specialist using OiRA to assess COVID-19 related risks.

range of companies of different sizes, mostly in public sectors). **This approach highlights OiRA's flexibility so that users can tailor the tools to the specific needs of the organisation in which they deliver services.**

In particular, two interviewees stated that they had to include additional risks (additional measurements and examinations) because not all legal obligations were covered<sup>18</sup> and four said that they had to include some more mitigation measures and risks, for example, due to the sector-specific needs of their clients or workplaces (including an internal specialist in the port activities, who had to add specific maritime transportation measures). One interviewee — providing services for the healthcare sector — further exemplified such modification:

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*The proposed measures are insufficiently concrete. There are too few risks and measures due to the use of work equipment (e.g. UV radiation, electric shock, rotating parts, blades), manual handling ... We also add our measures. We have added risks and measures due to possible cuts, squeezes, trips, slips, and falls ...*

**External OSH service provider for the healthcare sector (unspecified OiRA tools)**

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At the same time, interviews suggested that several OiRA tools are combined for a single RA. That is logical considering the OSH external experts who browsed through different methods and combined them (see Table 3). Interestingly, one direct OiRA user also mentioned combining several OiRA tools for one RA since there was no dedicated tool for the company sector: 'There is no OiRA for caregivers in Slovenia, so OiRA was used for teachers, hairdressers, and salespeople.'

#### ▪ How often do companies use OiRA?

Most interviewees mentioned that the OSH external experts had access to OiRA tools, rather than the client. **Considering the general lack of follow-up with OSH external experts, as reported by OSH external experts themselves, it can be assumed that RA is carried out only once.** Several respondents reported that they do not routinely update RAs created with OiRA. Statements such as 'We did not update our RA' and 'We have never audited risk assessments made with OiRA' (six OSH external experts) reflect a broader trend where once an RA is completed using OiRA, it often remains unchanged unless specifically required.

Some users mentioned having pending updates or audits of RAs produced with OiRA, suggesting a willingness to do so in the future. At the same time, it has to be noted that **if the OSH expert from their account fills in OiRA, the client (employer), for whose workplace the RA was conducted, has limited ability to update OiRA of their own volition.**

On the other hand, interviewees shared that updates to OiRA are typically driven by specific triggers, such as changes in processes and new job roles, and it is the client's responsibility to update the RA. One interviewee noted: 'The employers contact us to revise RA, at its discretion, most often when there are changes in processes, new working places, new locations, etc. Only that part of the RA that is no longer relevant is supplemented'. This indicates that, in this case, updates are selective, focusing on modifying only the modules of the RA that are impacted by the changes.

Another perspective highlighted the infrequent use of OiRA updates, especially when the tool was employed for particular purposes. However, this example refers to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a very specific situation. The user mentioned: 'We have only used OiRA for COVID-19 and have not used updates anywhere yet', indicating that the use of OiRA in that specific context was a one-off, with no emphasis on revisiting the RA later.

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<sup>18</sup> External experts delivering services for mostly medium-sized healthcare education and public administration sectors, and to a range of companies of different sizes, mostly in the public sector.



## 6.2.2 Working with the action plan and OiRA measures

The analysis of the interview responses indicates that reports and action plans generated by OiRA are commonly downloaded or printed by users, both internal (two out of three) and external specialists (all but one, who opted to provide summaries) interviewed. Most external experts reported providing all the OiRA-generated documentation to clients. Some noted that specific actions or measures were highlighted for clarity and emphasis. However, some users found the OiRA outputs somewhat challenging or redundant, but they were still made available to clients.

In some cases, documents are provided to clients primarily for formal — transparency — purposes. Another interviewee observed that clients, particularly micro-employers, often save these documents to use them in the event of an inspection rather than actively engaging with the content or implementing the proposed measures. This, however, should be coupled with the sometimes mentioned lack of clarity among the interviewees as to whether OiRA documentation is, in fact, proof of an RA (see section 6.3.2, OiRA tools complementary to other RA methods).

Altogether, six interviewees stated that the measures proposed by OiRA are useful and appropriate (including two internal specialists and four external).<sup>19</sup> While more than half of the interviewees stated that the measures were adequate, three evaluated the proposed measures as too general and found that they needed to be more specific, especially for the more hazardous activities.<sup>20</sup> Some interviewees also added more measures.

In terms of applying particular measures proposed in the workplaces, because the sample was composed mainly of OSH experts who were delivering or supporting RA processes at companies, their responsibilities did not cover implementing the measures:

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*From our side, after we submit the RA, we no longer have contact with the employer, and we don't know if supervision or measures are implemented. The only contact is when incidents occur, and the employer contacts us for advice. Also we don't have the levers to control and implement measures.*

**External OSH service provider for healthcare, education, public administration, metal processing and car maintenance sectors (most available OiRA tools)**

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Therefore, no insights into implementing OiRA measures specifically could be extracted. For direct OiRA users who used it for their workplaces, the measures were implemented in two cases (port activities and care facility), and in one not, due to the perceived low quality of the output.

## 6.3 In which ways is OiRA used by the interviewees?

In this section, the most commonly reported uses of OiRA are discussed. As external OSH service consultants form the majority of interviewees within the sample, there is a bias in how the tool has been reported to be used (with and for their clients). **External OSH experts rarely use the tool as a stand-alone, universally applicable tool. However, they seem to complement the RAs they carry out with certain parts of OiRA tools.**

Interestingly, the **internal OSH specialists indicated quite similar OiRA uses** — that is, OiRA was intentionally used to address particular needs, for example, for cross-checking and supplementing OiRA with other methods (or vice versa, as reported by two direct OiRA users). This translated to quite diverse RA processes: where one interviewee used OiRA solely to assess pandemic-related risks, the second used it in addition to other tools, treating OiRA outputs as a validation tool, and the third used OiRA to

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<sup>19</sup> Serving mostly small and some medium companies, though no direct link was provided between the size or sector of the company, and appropriateness of measures.

<sup>20</sup> Two external providers — medium manufacturing companies, and for enterprises mostly in the healthcare, education and public administration sectors, and one internal specialist — small fire safety company.

conduct RA in their small company, using the office work tool. Such a spectrum of uses impacts the analysis as set out below, recognising this bias.

For the above-mentioned reasons, this section is structured around two reported modes of OiRA use: (1) situations when OiRA was used as a stand-alone tool, and (2) the use of OiRA as a supplement to other methods. In addition, different motivations for using OiRA emerged through the analysis of the modes, which are discussed alongside them.

### 6.3.1 OiRA as a stand-alone RA tool

Considering the specificity of the study sample, the use of OiRA as a stand-alone tool was either reported by the external experts who delivered RAs for their clients or supported them in conducting them themselves, or, in one instance, it was an owner of a fire safety company who used OiRA for RA in their company (the office work tool). In all those cases, such a mode of use was typically linked with **small companies, with less hazardous working environments, and in situations where specific sectoral OiRA tools were available**. In the opinion of five external experts (delivering services for small and medium companies), where tasks were not too complex, persons were self-employed (or it was a micro-company) and the required OiRA sectoral tool was available, **OiRA was deemed appropriate and was used without combining it with other tools**.

Overall, those interviewees indicated the suitability of OiRA in Slovenia for MSEs. In those instances, the external OSH experts either: (1) referred their client to OiRA directly; (2) suggested OiRA use and offered support in dealing with it; or (3) used OiRA directly, with inputs from the company (for more details, see also section 6.2.1, Who carries out OiRA RA, and how is this organised?).

For example, an external OSH expert with previous experience with MSE clients in the automotive sector summarised this process as such:

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*For small clients, we refer them to OiRA and work through the RA together. For more complex assessments, we refer them to other methods. ... We go through OiRA requirements together with the client. The client would find it difficult to complete the RA on their own. ... We find the appropriate OiRA tool for their profession and go through the entire RA process with the client. ... We use OiRA for small employers, such as various craftsmen and administrative work. In those cases, we use only OiRA.*

**External OSH service provider for automotive sector companies (vehicles - car & heavy loads vehicles repair tool)**

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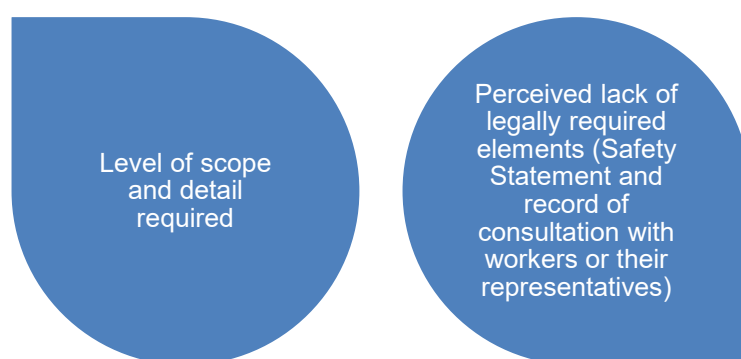
Finally, it has to be taken into account that the study includes a very limited representation of companies conducting RA internally.

### 6.3.2 OiRA tools complementary to other RA methods

OiRA was reported to be most frequently used as a supplementary or complementary approach alongside other RA methodologies (including, as often mentioned, ZVD and AUVA).

The reasons for such a widespread modality of OiRA use among the interviewees seem to stem from two observed shortcomings of OiRA in particular (although study sample bias should be recognised in this instance):

Figure 9. Barriers in using OiRA as a stand-alone tool



For most external and internal specialists, OiRA was **unable to respond to the wide range of needs of the interviewed users**. For external experts, not all the sectors in which they were delivering services had a dedicated OiRA tool. At the same time, they observed that OiRA may not be appropriate for more complex or hazardous workplaces. Considering OiRA's intended design — to support micro and small companies — it is not made to cater to the diverse needs of the external providers' clients (which presented a variety of enterprise sizes, working in different sectors). At the same time, two interviewees who delivered RA for their own workplaces in large companies recognised that their working environments were too complex to be efficiently covered by OiRA alone.

Additionally, three external experts (providing services for small and medium companies in automotive and manufacturing sectors) and an owner of a small fire safety company recognised that **OiRA lacks the legally required Safety Statement and record of consultation with workers** (see section 2.1, Legal framework), making OiRA outputs potentially non-compliant with the requirements for a valid RA.<sup>21</sup> Such an opinion may be coupled with the perceived need to supplement the additional documents. One interviewee summarised it by saying:

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*Since OiRA does not meet all the requirements of Slovenian legislation, it does not allow you to create a final document and it must be supplemented. As such, it is not useful enough and it is necessary to combine it.*

**External OSH service provider for the healthcare sector (unspecified OiRA tools)**

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This lack of a Safety Statement and record of consultation with workers or their representatives in the OiRA tool could present a barrier for small and medium enterprises. However, such a document can easily be created and attached to the general report generated by OiRA (especially by OSH experts), which might not entirely explain why OiRA would not be used as a stand-alone tool.

Another gap, confirmed by both OSH external experts and direct OiRA users, was the lack of modules/tools dedicated to manual handling and chemicals. This can be correlated with the adoption of 'Rules on ensuring the safety and health of workers when moving loads manually' in August 2024 in Slovenia, which imposed the specific requirement to conduct a RA in manual handling.

Interviewees stressed the importance of the rules change. As of August 2024, during the scoping interview, the representative trade union mentioned that companies are aware of the upcoming change and were looking for approaches on how to be compliant with new areas of RA to be covered. Equally, some interviewees mentioned already testing some approaches recommended by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities, or they directly mentioned the lack of coverage of manual handling as a gap in OiRA.

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<sup>21</sup> It has to be pointed out though, that it was unclear from the interviews if that is indeed the case, suggesting it to be an issue of clear communication, rather than a de facto legal issue.

Indeed, since no consolidated approach at the national level existed, the ministry recommended using the KIM-PP (see section 2.2, Description of tools and approaches used for risk assessment other than OiRA). Notably, while the original German version was interactive (automatically calculating the severity of the risk), the Slovenian adaptation is an offline checklist/questionnaire. Similar gaps exist in the case of RA for the chemicals; however, the ministry did not recommend any specific methodology as of September 2024.

Hence OiRA's role — in complementing other methods — was rather seen as **increasing thoroughness and awareness, compliance and appropriateness** of and about the RA process (see Figure 11). This type of OiRA use was not limited to external providers but was also indicated by two specialists conducting RA internally. In essence, OiRA was treated as **one of the possible approaches in the broader toolkit of methods for RAs** and used as deemed appropriate.

Figure 10. Categories of the complementary OiRA use



#### ▪ Raising awareness and education

The impact of OiRA's complementary use on awareness-raising and education can be described by the **educational use, which sensitises its users to issues of OSH and RA and provides information about the risks.**

OiRA has been recognised for its educational value, particularly for small and micro-enterprises. Several interviewees indicated the tool's ability to improve understanding and awareness of occupational safety, OSH practices, and legislation — marked by both external and internal RA providers. It is also important to point out that this educational purpose was twofold: it was used both to teach users about the legal requirements of RA and, more importantly, to sensitise employers to risks and RA requirements and provide them with additional information.

One interviewee had a noteworthy opinion on OiRA's educational use, pointing to its effectiveness in informing employers about the extent and seriousness of risks:

*The planned measures in OiRA show very nicely the possible measures and it has a very good educational function. Although we do not use OiRA to produce RAs, we refer employers to look at OiRA and learn what a risk assessment covers and how deep it goes. ... The teaching aspect and the educational aspect is excellent, so that employers see the depth of the requirements and the possible measures for elimination or risk reduction. The possibility for employers to do at least part of the assessment themselves has a great educational effect on employers.*

**External OSH service provider for healthcare, education, public administration, metal processing, car maintenance sectors (most of available OiRA tools)**

It is important to acknowledge the impact of OiRA on smaller businesses in this regard. The interviewees noted that using OiRA for educational purposes rather than for RA better aligns with employers' abilities and skills. As one interviewee continued:

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*For micro and small companies and employers, it seems too long and, consequently, too demanding to be implemented by themselves. [However] With employers' use and cooperation, OiRA can greatly contribute to the educational effect. OiRA is an excellent educational tool.*

**External OSH service provider for the manufacturing industry (office work tool)**

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- **Check alignment with legislation and improve coverage of the RAs**

OiRA is frequently used as a **checklist or validation tool for assessments conducted using other tools**. This is to make sure the RAs done with other tools are not missing out on any area. At the same time, these kinds of checks highly benefit from the legal information provided in the OiRA tools and as such are often used by users also to check the overall legal compliance of their approaches taken.

In terms of improving the thoroughness of the assessments, in one exemplary case, **OiRA's report and action plan were used to improve other RA methods**, such as the AUVA methodology. This involved comparing the outputs provided by OiRA with those produced by AUVA. When inconsistencies or gaps were found, OiRA was used to address these issues further:

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*We used different methods for implementing the full RA. The basis of the method is the AUVA, which was supplemented with requirements from the OiRA, ... [such as] actions and measures from OiRA, which were meaningful and were not present in AUVA method.*

**Direct OiRA user – OSH specialist in care facility/caregiving sector (educational establishment with elements of hairdressers and wholesale & retail trade tools)**

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Apart from that, OiRA was regarded (by external and internal experts alike) as a method that allows users to find and consider risks that were initially not taken into account or to better identify those risks. Here, especially if OiRA was not applied to conduct full and compliant RA, it was still recognised as a platform that allows for more thorough assessments but also to check for legislative aspects that had been missed before.

However, opinions on the scope and relevance of information on legal requirements were mixed. The particular characteristics of OiRA can explain this apparent contradiction. While OiRA was perceived as lacking the legally required Safety Statement, it simultaneously provided information about current legislation. So, while OiRA was not unequivocally perceived as a tool capable of ensuring full compliance with legislative requirements for RA, it was praised for its ability to provide feedback and verification regarding compliance with the existing legal framework.

In particular, OiRA was **valued for its detailed legislative feedback** that guides users through specific legislative articles, explaining what is required at each step. This way, users can use OiRA as a 'compliance' or 'legal validation' tool to ensure that their assessments fulfilled all required standards:

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*OiRA has excellent legislative guidelines that guide you through individual articles of the legislation and explain what is required during guidance throughout the entire process. We use it as a checklist to guide us through the legislative requirements.*

**External OSH service provider for healthcare, education, public administration, metal processing, car maintenance sectors (most available OiRA tools)**

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▪ **Supporting the appropriateness of the RA (e.g. case of the COVID-19 tool)**

The popularity of the OiRA COVID-19 tool among the interviewees seems to be linked to the **lack of appropriate methodologies** for assessing the new risks associated with the new virus when the need emerged. **OiRA filled in this gap**, making it an appreciated resource during the crisis. Overall, it seems that OiRA played an important role in educating people and providing additional support during the pandemic. While not used in the companies as the only RA approach, OiRA's COVID-19 tool proved invaluable in this context. How this particular tool was actually used in practice varied among interviewees, although in this instance, it was not a case of mere legal compliance, but rather, a tool that allowed them to learn more about risks and be more thorough:

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*Since COVID was something completely new for everyone, we had not previously prepared any RA for this or a similar case. Thus, we did not have much experience both in finding risks and in implementing measures. Every piece of information we got about the RA for the needs of COVID [prevention] was very valuable to us and helped us prepare the RA.*

**External OSH service provider for the healthcare sector (unspecified OiRA tools)**

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Here in particular the tool was not 'combined' with other methodologies but rather added as a supplementary, especially useful approach to be used only in this limited context.

A specifically telling example is the experience of the already mentioned company in the sector of port activities, which conducts RA internally using its own RA methodology. As a large enterprise, they do not find OiRA particularly useful. However, thanks to the availability of the OiRA COVID-19 tool, they were able to cover all their employees with an appropriate RA in relation to this newly emerged risk:

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*We don't directly use OiRA because as a large employer, it isn't suitable for us, especially considering our highly specific port-related activities. However, during COVID-19, when we had to conduct risk assessments for all employees, it served as a valuable source of information.*

**Direct OiRA user – social worker and HR specialist in company engaged in maritime logistics (COVID-19 tool)**

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The COVID-19 tool, while not the most widely used OiRA tool in Slovenia, showed how the platform can quickly provide current information during a crisis, demonstrating its flexibility, agility and effectiveness. This particular use of OiRA points to its potential to respond effectively to emerging risks, making it a very useful solution because of its responsive nature.



## 7 Findings on other tools used

### 7.1 ZVD and AUVA method

The ZVD and AUVA methods are very similar. The Austrian General Accident Insurance Institute created the AUVA method, which the ZVD method adapts to the Slovenian context and requirements. These two tools were often referred to in the interviews, with four interviewees mentioning the ZVD and five mentioning the AUVA. Both offline checklists organise the RA process in seven key steps.

**Step 1: Assessment area** includes assessing the area that will be covered in the RA related to the company's sector and the scope of its activities. **Step 2: Employees and work** includes preparing the list of employees, their tasks and OSH characteristics of their work. Further, **Step 3: Baseline Data** involves data gathering by delivering relevant measurements (such as noise, light, etc.), inspecting work equipment, reviewing the documents related to the OSH training of employees, and discussing with employer and employee representatives. Once the relevant information is gathered, RA continues with **Step 4: Checklist**. The checklist includes relevant thematic areas, as presented in Table 3. Within that step, a person responsible for the RA fills in the checklist by each thematic area, indicating the relevant issues identified within each category.

Table 3. Scope of ZVD/AUVA thematic coverage

Thematic areas of ZVD and AUVA method
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. OSH management</li> <li>2. Mechanical hazards</li> <li>3. Electricity, non-ionising and ionising radiation</li> <li>4. Hazardous substances</li> <li>5. Biogenic hazards</li> <li>6. Thermal conditions and ventilation</li> <li>7. Fire and explosions</li> <li>8. Touch temperature</li> <li>9. Noise and ultrasound</li> <li>10. Vibrations</li> <li>11. Lighting</li> <li>12. Increased/decreased air pressure</li> <li>13. Physical stress</li> <li>14. Mental and sensory stress</li> <li>15. Maintenance and hygiene loads</li> <li>16. Training</li> <li>17. Organisation of first aid</li> <li>18. Employee involvement</li> <li>19. Other.</li> </ol>

Source: Ecorys, based on the working translation of ZVD/AUVA checklist

**Step 5: Risk Points** includes further analysis and assessment of the severity of each risk. In this step, the person responsible for RA reviews the factors relevant to present risks, considering issues such as time of exposure or number of employees affected. **Step 6: Risk Level and Measures** provides the quantification of risks on a scale from 1 to 5:

(1) risk is minimal, no action is required;

- (2) if the risk is acceptable, it is necessary to monitor the situation;
- (3) if the risk is moderate (within the limits of the regulations), it is necessary to consider measures to reduce the risk;
- (4) if the risk is unacceptable and does not comply with the regulations, measures must be introduced immediately; and
- (5) if the regulations are significantly violated, with severe exposure to risks, the company may be required to stop their activity until the risk is effectively removed.

The risk scale aims to determine the priority order of measures and assess the measure's effectiveness to be introduced. The ZVD/AUVA method does not have predefined measures but classifies them into technical measures, organisational measures and worker behaviour. **Step 6** is concluded by developing specific measures to identified risks and creating a plan for action to prioritise addressing the most severe risks. **Step 7: Drawing up the Safety Statement** includes employers confirming their responsibility for introducing the measures (please see Box 1, Scope of Safety Statement in section 2.1, Legal framework).

Overall, within the interviewed sample, these tools were applied in various ways, depending on the company's specific needs, with some modifications applied to better suit particular enterprises.

## 7.2 What are the main differences between OiRA tools and ZVD/AUVA methods?

The main differences between OiRA and those other tools are summarised in the Figure 12.

Figure 11. Main features of OiRA versus ZVD/AUVA

OiRA	ZVD/AUVA
❖ <b>Online</b>	❖ <b>Offline</b>
❖ Structured and systematic approach	❖ Very flexible approach, structure partly needs to be defined by user
❖ Appropriate for less complex working environments of MSEs	❖ Broader risk coverage for more complex environments, e.g. large companies
❖ User-friendly design	❖ More technical procedure, requiring experience and expertise
❖ Providing links to existing legislation	❖ Not including legislation but perceived as covering issues specified in legislation (e.g. manual handling)
❖ Useful for education and raising awareness on OSH issues	❖ Not including an educative component

The most straightforward difference between the OiRA tool and other approaches is the online nature of OiRA tools. However, as argued in section 3.2, How do the interviewees use OiRA?, the **online/offline aspect may be less relevant for the work of OSH external experts, who tend to be responsible for filling in RA software based on the information from the companies**. Interestingly, three direct OiRA users did not make any explicit comments about the online nature of the OiRA tool. On the other hand,



external OSH experts mentioned that in the case of some companies, the tool's online nature could be an obstacle due to issues with IT literacy.

Interviewees reported that OiRA is designed to offer a **structured, systematic and user-friendly approach** to RA that is widely regarded as suitable for MSEs in relatively straightforward, **lower-risk environments**. Many interviewees appreciated OiRA's ability to **guide users** through the assessment process in a clear and organised manner. Indeed, in comparison, OiRA is assessed as an easy-to-understand and follow tool that supports RA. For example, a direct OiRA user from the fire safety company claimed: 'I tried the AUVA method, but I had a problem understanding the method. ... OiRA is good enough and better than other methods and approaches known to us'.

In comparison, interviewees described other methodologies as **offering broader risk coverage: these methods were noted for their flexibility, making them particularly suitable for industries and companies that require more detailed and specialised assessments** in some sectors (for example, where different types of measurements — the ones which OiRA could not provide — had to be applied). They also require more OSH expertise to be properly utilised and are structured based on risk categories, rather than following a structure based on tasks implemented in the respective company. The comprehensive nature of these methods might not necessarily be needed for all users, especially those whose needs are already met by the more streamlined approach offered by OiRA, which are usually the intended MSE users.

Interviewees noted that **OiRA integrates legislative requirements into its process, providing a useful checklist for ensuring compliance with general OSH regulations**. However, they also pointed out that OiRA **may lack the coverage to meet specific national legislation**. This limitation was mentioned as a shortcoming, with interviewees stating that OiRA may need to be supplemented with other tools to fulfil all legal obligations. Other RA methods were described as being **more aligned with those requirements**. Interviewees emphasised specifically that these methods are used to produce documentation mandated by law, the Safety Statements. They highlighted these approaches as better suited for ensuring full legal compliance in larger enterprises or those where especially dangerous tasks are performed.

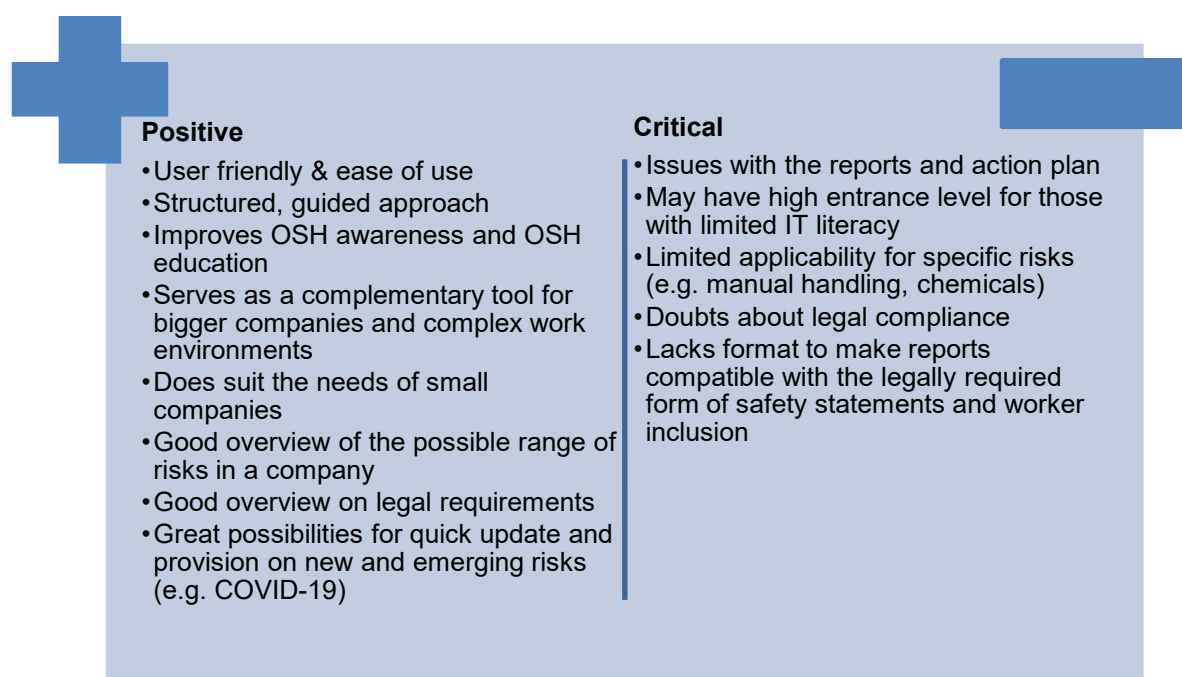
Lastly, interviewees acknowledged OiRA as an **excellent introductory tool to sensitise users to OSH issues** and highlighted OiRA's educational for increasing OSH awareness.

Finally, the other methods mentioned, especially ZVD, have also been strongly embedded in the OSH landscape and are popular among OSH experts. As presented in section 2.1, Legal framework, OSH external experts must complete a specific training to get permission to work in such a capacity. Notably, to get the qualification, they need to demonstrate that they are familiar with the methods of RA assessment. ZVD tends to be a frequently used method to demonstrate familiarity with RA to get a qualification. Therefore, one assumption is also that **convenience and habits related to conducting RA play an important role** and OSH external experts tend to proceed with similar methods after completing their examination.

## 8 A comparative perspective on how OiRA is assessed

While OiRA was perceived mostly positively by the interviewees, there were some recognised challenges, which pose an opportunity to further improve OiRA and the Slovenian approach to it and facilitate a more widespread use of this tool in the country. Those positive and critical assessments are summarised below (Figure 13).

Figure 12. Main points on how OiRA is assessed



Positive	Critical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User friendly &amp; ease of use</li> <li>• Structured, guided approach</li> <li>• Improves OSH awareness and OSH education</li> <li>• Serves as a complementary tool for bigger companies and complex work environments</li> <li>• Does suit the needs of small companies</li> <li>• Good overview of the possible range of risks in a company</li> <li>• Good overview on legal requirements</li> <li>• Great possibilities for quick update and provision on new and emerging risks (e.g. COVID-19)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues with the reports and action plan</li> <li>• May have high entrance level for those with limited IT literacy</li> <li>• Limited applicability for specific risks (e.g. manual handling, chemicals)</li> <li>• Doubts about legal compliance</li> <li>• Lacks format to make reports compatible with the legally required form of safety statements and worker inclusion</li> </ul>

## 8.1 Aspects appreciated by users

As mentioned above according to OiRA Metabase data, 66.3% of users would recommend the tool, with only 2.79% indicating otherwise.<sup>22</sup> This is slightly more positive compared to the responses gathered in this qualitative study. Eight interviewees indicated they would recommend OiRA, while two said they would not. Among those who would recommend it, the predominant opinion was that it is a tool suitable for MSEs, in line with OiRA's intended use.

### ▪ Guidance in RA process, enhancing OSH knowledge

Interviewees also positively noted OiRA's ability to guide users through the entire RA process transparently, clearly presenting risks and measures. In their opinion, this contrasts with other methods, such as checklists, which are less comprehensible to non-experts. They especially appreciated OiRA's systematic guidance through the RA as well as through the legislative aspects, which helped them and/or their clients to better understand the full scope of risks associated with their operations. In contrast, it was noted that other offline checklist-type assessment methods did not fully demonstrate this dimension.

One user noted:

*OiRA gives you better identification of risks and measures than other RA tools.*

**Direct OiRA user – OSH specialist in care facility/caregiving sector (educational establishment with elements of hairdressers and wholesale & retail trade tools)**

External service providers for companies in multiple sectors acknowledged OiRA's role in enhancing understanding of OSH principles even if, from an OSH expert perspective, they did not find it comprehensive enough to cover all risks and provide a legally valid RA. Overall, the educational value

<sup>22</sup> As of September 2024. 30.9% of respondents to the voluntary questionnaire did not provide an answer to this question.

of OiRA should not be overlooked when discussing which OiRA features and capabilities were most positively assessed. Interviewees appreciated that OiRA provided information about risks (in line with the current legislation) and sensitised business owners to OSH issues. This positive aspect of OiRA was seen as having a positive impact on workplace safety (even if not directly through RA) and was highly appreciated (see section 6.3.2, OiRA tools complementary to other RA methods).

#### ▪ User friendliness

All respondents perceived OiRA to be user friendly, with five interviewees describing it as clear, understandable, intuitive and logical. Further, they stated that the tool is easy to use, and they did not encounter any difficulties even on the first attempt:

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*For me, the use of OiRA was understandable, transparent, and user-friendly.*

**External OSH service provider for healthcare, education, public administration, metal processing, car maintenance sectors (most available OiRA tools)**

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Seven interviewees considered the layout of OiRA to be appropriate, well-structured and modern (also in comparison to other tools). It was also mentioned that it streamlined the RA process (two considered it neutral, yet not discouraging). As one external provider and one internal specialist pointed out, the well-designed structure of the questionnaire and clear guidance resulted in a good-quality RA.

Further, regarding OiRA's language, all interviewees agreed that the tool is clear and understandable for OSH professionals.<sup>23</sup>

#### ▪ Relevant for MSEs and SMEs

Despite the limited sample of direct users, study findings suggest that **OiRA tools can directly support companies**. This was the case for a direct user who found the AUVA method overly complex and resorted to OiRA, which they found to be the best option for the needs of their micro-company. After comparing the two methods, another user claimed that OiRA offers better support in identifying risks and measures. Another direct user looked for an alternative after not being satisfied with the services of an external OSH expert and was happy with the OiRA experience. Direct OiRA users also appreciated using the COVID-19 tool to validate their previous approach in the light of the health crisis.

These limited examples indicate that OiRA can be useful when directly used by companies. Additionally, **OSH external experts mentioned that they see OiRA as a relevant tool for self-employed people, MSEs and SMEs, and some of them even encouraged companies to use the tool (with or without their support)**.

#### ▪ Agility and responsiveness

The popularity of the COVID-19 tool among interviewees highlighted OiRA's agility and ability to respond to emerging risks quickly. Interviewees appreciated that it was the only tool available to assess occupational risks related to the virus, ensure compliance with current legislation and provide guidance on securing workplace safety during the pandemic. In this case, OiRA's capacity for prompt updates, facilitated by its online nature, proved invaluable. These qualities were highly valued and pointed to OiRA's potential, as it effectively addressed the gap left by the rigidity of other commonly used, offline checklist-type assessments.

#### ▪ Collaborative potential

Finally, one interviewee also appreciated the collaborative potential of OiRA's online platform, noting that 'Collaborative work on the online platform seems useful' (external expert for small construction and craftsmanship companies), suggesting that OiRA's interactive nature is seen as a valuable asset.

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<sup>23</sup> Here, a sample bias may be considered, as almost all interviewees had background in OSH, so their opinion on clarity of language may be applicable only in cases of other professionals.

## 8.2 Ideas for improvement highlighted by users

### ▪ Reports and action plans:

Some interviewees expressed concerns specifically about the documents produced by OiRA (both on the side of external experts and direct OiRA users). Dissatisfaction was reported about the length of reports (external provider for medium-sized manufacturing companies), although not about the length of the action plan. It was also mentioned that reports might not be clear enough and not understandable for someone less experienced in RA-related issues. The latter was reported, in particular, by the direct OiRA user and owner of a small company, who decided to conduct the RA internally without previous experience. They indicated:

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

**Direct OiRA user – owner of small fire-safety company (office work tool)**

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### ▪ English terms

Additionally, English terms were reported to appear in descriptions and supporting materials, which, in the opinion of the interviewee — an external expert providing services to different companies — creates confusion among those who do not speak English.

### ▪ Redundancy

Further, three of the interviewees underlined redundant features of the tool. One said that some parts are duplicated and need to be entered multiple times (external expert). In contrast, another said that some questions seem redundant or repetitive regarding the suggested measures (direct OiRA user). A third interviewee noted: 'Perhaps PPE is repeated too often in some instances' (external OSH service provider for unspecified companies).

Importantly, the rest of the interviewees mostly confirmed that they found nothing redundant or repetitive, and the logical flow and overall clarity were praised.

### ▪ Required OSH knowledge

Several external experts raised the language of the tool and the overall issue of OSH expertise. However, it should be noted that no direct OiRA user has indicated this as a limitation. External experts mentioned that the tools are 'understandable for OSH experts' (themselves), and they generally seemed to be made for OSH experts rather than directly for companies. For example, one interviewee, who provides services for a range of different companies, reported on an instance where:

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*For an OSH expert, the language is suitable and we had no problems with understanding it, but it was more difficult for customers to understand. The hairdressers for whom we applied OiRA are mostly poorly educated about OSH topics and generally rather underestimate all OSH issues. Through the RA process, however, they see that it is a very broad field, with many requirements, and they are a little intimidated by it all.*

**External OSH service provider for the healthcare sector (unspecified OiRA tools)**

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Additionally, in this context, one external expert shared their strong opinion on the competencies required for delivering a RA. They were very much against the idea of workers or employers conducting the RAs without possessing the required expertise, questioning the appropriateness of OiRA use by MSEs themselves.

- **ICT proficiency of users**

The interviewees observed some limitations of the tool in relation to the end users' IT proficiency. This was exemplified by external experts providing services for different sectors (mostly in the public sector), who stated that 'OiRA tools are always filled out by an OSH expert who is already familiar with how OiRA works. However, in the beginning, it was necessary to go through the entire process of using OiRA to understand how it works. Due to good IT proficiency, there were no major issues, and support was not needed'. One interviewee also highlighted that this lack of IT proficiency in smaller companies resulted in clients relying on the services provided by the external support:

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*We do not have any issues with usage ourselves, but clients over 50 years old, who do not have IT training, have faced difficulties and heavily rely on our support ... OiRA is user-friendly enough for OSH professionals but is too demanding for those with poor IT literacy.*

**External OSH service provider for unspecified companies (office work, wholesale & retail trade, cleaning, hairdressers, road transport tools)**

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However, since the general feedback on the usability and ease of the software was very good, it needs to be highlighted that this kind of negative feedback was only provided by third parties (the external service providers) assessing the ICT proficiency of their clients not by the direct users.

- **Limited scope**

As already explained, some interviewees commented on the limited scope of the proposed questionnaires and measures in OiRA. As already discussed, such criticism should be considered with caution since the sample included mostly external experts providing services to a diverse range of entities and internal specialists in two large companies. With OiRA being developed to serve small companies' needs, such opinions need to be carefully considered when developing strategic approaches on the future progress of the platform targeting MSEs.

## 9 Conclusions and key pointers

Findings from the interviews and analysis of the data from the OiRA Metabase (see section 3.2, Use of OiRA tools) indicate that **OiRA plays a specific yet important role in the OSH landscape in Slovenia**. This study has examined the varied OiRA tools used by diverse users, aligning with the composition of the OSH practices in Slovenia, where **most OSH and RA activities are provided by external services** — the highest rate in the EU. Contrary to the initial phase of the study, it became clear that recruiting a sufficiently large group of MSEs using OiRA was impossible.

In line with these considerations — high dependence on external services and recruitment challenges — the sample predominantly included external OSH providers. In Slovenia, contrary to the original aim of OiRA, **it appears to be used more frequently by OSH service providers than by companies directly**. However, this should be considered within the broader context of the overall OSH landscape in Slovenia and the role of external experts within it. At the same time, the users who used OiRA directly — that is without the external experts involved — reported that OiRA met their needs and was suitable for the purpose.

The main takeaway from the study is that **the application of OiRA in Slovenia** based on the sample for this study **demonstrated an approach in which it was used in combination with other RA methods**. OiRA was chosen by the interviewees based on its applicability to specific workplaces. In this decision-making process, as reported by the interviewees, it became apparent that **OiRA serves its**



**purpose best in the smaller enterprises.** The process of choosing the appropriate method for RA was guided mostly by the particular needs of the working environment, with the most important considerations being the character of the work (e.g. less hazardous) and the complexity of the workplace, including its size. Therefore, OiRA was deemed an appropriate RA method for MSEs, yet not comprehensive enough for larger establishments. The combination of using different approaches in combination was particularly prevalent in specific sectors or work environments, underlining the fact that while OiRA offered valuable support, participants were often of the view that it did not suffice on its own — especially in larger workplaces. Therefore, OiRA was often treated as **one of the tools in the RA methodological toolbox**, especially, but not exclusively, by the external OSH service providers. This was, at least partially, because by design, OiRA is not intended to fulfil the very diverse needs of the more complex working environments, with a multitude of different roles and tasks in bigger companies.

The interviewees' reliance on additional tools alongside OiRA was driven by its recognised limitations. Users acknowledged that **OiRA does not fully align with all legal requirements**, especially because it did not produce the Safety Statement in the format required by legislation, and its scope was often seen as too narrow to address all necessary aspects of an RA. As a result, OSH experts sought supplementary tools and methodologies to ensure a more complete and legally compliant RA process at workplaces or in sectors where they recognised a need. The reasons for the Slovenian OiRA tools being assessed as not always covering all issues in a company could also stem from the specific set-up of the tools, often covering certain professions instead of all company activities. For example, separate tools are set up for cooks and waiters instead of covering both activities with one tool for restaurants.

Therefore, for **OSH external experts, using the OiRA tools could be considered an additional effort beyond their well-established ways of working** (i.e. using the methods they are the most familiar with). At the same time, an openness to new tools and methods was identified, as exemplified by the introduction of a new tool to assess risks related to the manual handling of loads (see section 2.2, Description of tools and approaches used for risk assessment other than OiRA). During the study, new legal requirements for the safe handling of loads were introduced, prompting the adaptation of this new methodology. Similarly, as expressed in several interviews, OSH external experts highly appreciated the OiRA COVID-19 tool, which allowed them to navigate RA when no other reliable sources on occupational pandemic-related risks were available. Overall, OSH external experts remained open and willing to include other methodologies in their work as needed and relevant. Yet, they treated them as a selection of approaches rather than switching to other methodologies to conduct the full, comprehensive RA altogether.

It could be argued that especially **OSH external experts, when considering sectoral tools, are not sufficiently incentivised to select OiRA tools**. With their services covering companies of different sizes and in different sectors, OiRA may not be the first and only choice. This needs to be coupled with the observation that other methods are simply more familiar to the experts, as they are well embedded in the Slovenian OSH landscape and experts have been working with them for years. It should be noted, however, that the OiRA tools were not developed to target the needs of OSH experts but to support smaller enterprises. **In that role — providing a free-of-charge, online RA method for MSEs — OiRA proved to be relevant and sufficient.**

At the same time, all OSH external experts interviewed said that those **smaller enterprises tend to be discouraged from conducting any RA independently**, regardless of the tools selected. This is due, among other things, to the legislative requirement that employers who want to conduct their own legally valid RA must be certified in that area (see the section Legal requirement for education to conduct valid risk assessment in section 2.1, Legal framework). As such, conducting internal RAs requires, even at the very start, an investment. Overall, the high dependence on externally provided services and OiRA not being completely compatible with external OSH experts' needs may pose a challenge in the more widespread adoption of OiRA by MSEs in Slovenia.

On the other hand, study findings suggest that **OiRA plays an important role in the Slovenian OSH landscape, yet to a degree not intended in its original design**. As was discussed in the interviews, the use of OiRA tools, that is, in combination with other tools, **should be considered in relation to the notion of enriching RA methods in Slovenia**.

As discussed throughout the report, OiRA tools were combined with other tools due to **their educational value, clear links to relevant legislation and the fact that they address the gaps in RA practice** which other tools might have. Here in particular, the case of the OiRA COVID-19 tool played a key role. From this perspective, using OiRA with other RA tools should be considered a **positive outcome**. The findings indicate that OiRA is used beyond its intended scope of coverage and addresses the gaps of other RA tools where relevant and applicable. As interviewees reported, OiRA was used as an educational resource, used, for example, to sensitise employers to the extent and scope of possible risks and mitigation measures. Further, it allowed the OSH experts, both internal and external, to check the links between the identified risks and the current legislation and to learn about risks that were not previously considered. As such, OiRA was used to ensure that the RA, even if conducted using other methods, was complete, comprehensive and in line with the most up-to-date legal requirements. Another point that stood out was OiRA's high adaptability and capacity to provide a quick and useful guide to COVID-19 prevention during the pandemic. In this aspect, it was noted that OiRA filled a gap that was beyond the scope of traditional measures. In terms of new and emerging risks, such as aspects of digitalisation but also the degree of preparedness for a general crisis, OiRA is seen as a unique tool that can support national authorities in information provision.

The examples of how OiRA was used with other methods suggest that OiRA was often not used as intended — that is, to provide the RA to small enterprises — yet, in the end, it had a tangible positive impact on occupational safety.

Importantly, despite its reported limitations and its use alongside other methods, **OiRA was valued for its utility among small businesses**, aligning with its intended purpose. Interviewees mostly shared the opinion that while OiRA is not suitable for larger, more complex and hazardous workplaces, it is suitable for MSEs. Its straightforward and user-friendly interface, coupled with free online access, means that it is recognised as an attractive option for smaller enterprises with limited resources. This resulted, for example, in external experts referring employers of such companies to use OiRA directly — with expert support provided.

Overall, **OiRA was positively assessed for its specific applications** — in relation to its distinct use among the Slovenian OSH experts interviewed. All respondents perceived OiRA as **user friendly**, with interviewees describing it as clear, understandable, intuitive and logical, with eight out of 10 interviewees reporting that they would recommend the tool.

In particular, it was praised for **providing guidance throughout the RA process**, which facilitated a more systematic approach and a better understanding of risks — something that other methods, especially offline checklists, did not offer. Consequently, OiRA was praised for its educational value and for supporting a thorough RA process by ensuring that no risks were overlooked.

Additionally, OiRA was regarded as an **agile and responsive tool**, as exemplified by the COVID-19 tool. Its ability to quickly adapt to emerging risks highlighted its flexibility. Furthermore, OiRA was noted for its **collaborative potential, although this feature was not frequently utilised**.

This rather positive assessment of OiRA was, however, coupled with some more critical voices, pointing towards the potential areas of improvement. In addition to the previously discussed perceived high-level limitations related to the legal validity of OiRA RA, several other issues emerged from the study.

**Not all OiRA features were known or utilised by users**, such as the ability to add risks or facilitate collaborative RAs. Users also expressed **concerns about the documents produced by OiRA**, finding the general report to be too lengthy and difficult to understand for individuals with less experience in OSH.

While more than half of the interviewees perceived the measures proposed by OiRA as useful and appropriate, the remaining respondents found them to be **too general and not specific enough**, especially for more hazardous workplaces. Additionally, some external OSH experts noted that employers often **do not follow up by implementing the recommended measures** after receiving a completed RA from an external consultant. Furthermore, these experts are frequently unaware if the measures have been implemented, as they are no longer involved with the company once the RA is completed, pointing to possible lack of accountability on the side of employers (which may be related with the reported perception that RA is needed to fulfil the legal obligations only).

Other issues identified include technical problems, such as perceived redundancy in certain features. Moreover, some interviewees opined that although OiRA is generally user friendly, a certain level of ICT proficiency is required, making it unsuitable for users who lack these capabilities.

In light of the discussed consideration, as a general observation from the study, strategic decisions should be made **regarding how far OiRA is meant to support SMEs or OSH experts** in providing better services to their users in the Slovenian context. Given the strong role of ZVD/AUVA methods in RA, especially among **OSH external experts — who conduct more than 80% of the RAs in Slovenia**, it could be useful to rethink the further strategic direction of OiRA's development.

## 9.1 Key pointers on further developing the OiRA approach in Slovenia

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

- **OiRA could be promoted as the only digital tool available in Slovenia**, distinguishing it from other RA methods that are primarily offline.
- **Highlighting the possibility of using OiRA internally without OSH service providers' support** might enhance OiRA's attractiveness for smaller companies.
- It may be worth considering **focusing OiRA more on the tools addressing areas not sufficiently covered by the ZVD/ AUVA methods**. For example, it could be useful to consider covering topics related to hazardous substances/chemicals and psychosocial risks.
- **The transposability of the printouts into legally compliant Safety Statements and a record of consultation with workers or their representatives needs to be considered** to make OiRA's outputs legally compliant.
- **Enhancing the quality and usefulness of OiRA-generated reports** is key for recognising the tool as a valid alternative to other RA methods. Thought should be given to how to improve the reports for better end user understanding. In this sense, it should be noted that while this study was being carried out, a new report format was developed and is available for OiRA countries to put it live. It might be worth considering this report format for Slovenian users but also, in parallel, following up closely on user feedback in relation to the new report format.
- There is a technical possibility to **integrate the decision on measures directly into the step of identifying the risk** (this feature is also called an 'integrated action plan'), which might remove some of the redundancies reported.
- **Promoting OiRA's different features (adding risks, collaborative assessment) would be beneficial**. Tutorials or other kinds of support and information would help point users to the full range of possibilities that OiRA gives them.
- **Careful design of the tools** might help to prevent redundancy but also make them more flexible, for example, by considering whether it would be possible to cover different professions and their related tasks in one tool, using optional modules, and other aspects that enhance flexibility, such as the 'not applicable' answer format.
- **Enabling OiRA's OSH Service feature could increase its use**. It is possible within OiRA to add an OSH Service feature at the national level, which allows external experts to edit and validate a company's RA while the company itself has its own log-in and access to all its data. Such a feature would give companies/clients more responsibility and insights into their RA process and provide OSH services with smoother collaboration possibilities with clients. Consideration could be given to making this feature available in all Slovenian OiRA tools and promoting it respectively. However, the buy-in of the OSH service providers is necessary, and it needs to be assured that they see OiRA as a way of improving their services instead of as a possible threat that might lead to them losing their clients.
- **Another recommendation would be to consider the 'training feature' for employers specifically**. This training feature in OiRA can be enabled at the national level for all tools and



enables users to go through the content of a tool on a type of online slides. It can be enhanced by enabling an OSH knowledge quiz based on the information that the tool covers. When users successfully answer the quiz questions, they earn a certificate to show that they have completed this training successfully. When the training feature was developed, this was mostly done bearing in mind that, according to the EU Framework Directive 89/391, employers are obliged to train their workers. However, in the specific Slovenian situation, it seems that this **feature might also be useful for engaging employers more fully in the RA process** and enhancing their engagement in implementing the proposed solutions. This feature could increase the use of OiRA at workplaces, even when RA processes are delegated to external contractors.

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