

## At the cutting edge of risk assessment

The development of the OiRA Online Interactive Risk Assessment tool by the Department of Labour Inspection in Cyprus for the Cypriot Hairdressers' Association



Prevention is better than cure. Yet while experience shows that proper risk assessment is the key to healthy workplaces, it equally shows that completing risk assessments can be both costly and confusing, particularly for micro and small organisations (MSEs) which may lack the resources or the occupational safety and health (OSH) know-how to do so effectively.

The OiRA Online Interactive Risk Assessment project aims to overcome these obstacles. Developed by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), OiRA is an easy-to-use and cost-free web application that can help micro and small organisations to put in place a step-by-step risk assessment process – starting with the identification and evaluation of workplace risks, through to the decision making on preventive actions and the taking of action, to monitoring and reporting.

To ensure that the OiRA tools offer a tangible benefit, EU-OSHA is putting the OiRA tool generator at the disposal of Sectoral Social Partners (employers' and employees' organisations) and National authorities (Ministries, Labour Inspectorates, OSH institutes, etc.) to develop OiRA tools that are targeted to specific sectors and national needs.

### The need for action

Every year there are over 168,000 work-related deaths, 7 million accidents and 20 million cases of work-related diseases across the European Member States – many of which are avoidable.

Risk assessment (RA) is a vital step in creating safer and healthier workplaces. Removing hazards or reducing the level of risk by

adding precautions or control measures is essential to the creation of safe environment.

The European Community Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012 called for the development of simple tools to facilitate risk assessment. Since the adoption of the European Framework directive in 1989, risk assessment has become a familiar concept for organising prevention in the workplace, and hundreds of thousands of companies across Europe regularly assess their risks.

Yet while the importance and benefits of risk assessment are clear, many of Europe's MSEs face considerable challenges in ensuring that thorough risk assessments are implemented and observed in their workplaces. Research by EU-OSHA found that 41% of Europe's MSEs felt they lacked the necessary expertise to carry out thorough risk assessments, with 38% believing that they are too expensive or overly time consuming<sup>1</sup>.



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The need for a simple, straight-forward and cost-free tool to support the 20 million micro and small organisations throughout the European Union was apparent.

### OiRA Advantages

Launched in September 2011, the OiRA project is the first initiative at EU level to encourage and assist European micro and small organisations (mainly via Governments or Public institutions and social partners at EU and at Member State level) to assess their risks.

The impact of similar initiatives aiming to improve the level of risk assessment, such as guides and checklists, is limited. Thus, the OiRA tool can make a real difference.

It offers a host of benefits as it:

- Is interactive, easy to use, easy to access and free for companies
- Helps "empower" and foster the autonomy of micro and small companies when it comes to RA (self-assessment)
- Helps companies to fulfil their legal obligation
- Can be easily disseminated online
- Offers evolutionary content ("easy-immediate" update)
- Has a didactic/methodological dimension (RA method: from Risk Identification to documenting the RA)

- Provides access to other sources of information/documentation (through the links)
- Gives access to online help tools (didactic/pedagogic tools)
- Is possible to monitor the development and use of such tools

### Cypriot engagement

The challenges of low-level risk assessment implementation among MSEs were well recognised among the Department of Labour Inspection (DLI) in Cyprus, which welcomed the OiRA project. "Raising awareness of risk is a crucial step to preventing future problems in the workplace," explains Marios Charalambous, Health and Safety Inspector at the Dept of Labour Inspection, "having in mind the need for intervention to facilitate the risk assessment process, the OiRA tool enables us to help businesses become aware of the risks that they face and offer them practical support in assessing risk – and ultimately improve both the working environment and performance".

"OiRA is an important tool for developing risk assessment for Europe's MSEs because it helps to improve the working conditions in the workplace for micro and small enterprises, systematically reducing risks to workers, implementing legislation and reducing the current administrative burdens. It is a tool that facilitates risk assessment with a list of benefits," he says.

<sup>1</sup>[http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/en\\_esener1-summary.pdf](http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/en_esener1-summary.pdf)

*“OiRA helps to improve the working conditions in the workplace for micro-small enterprises, systematically reducing risks to workers, implementing legislation and reducing the current administrative burdens.”*

### Restyling risk assessment

In Cyprus some 3,500 employees are employed in over 2,500 hairdressing salons, each exposed to risk on a daily basis. According to figures from EU-OSHA, hairdressing is the most high risk profession for occupational skin diseases. In some countries up to 70% of hairdressers suffer from work-related skin damage, which is at least 10 times more than the average for workers of all sectors<sup>2</sup>. Moreover a national survey in Cyprus in 2006 revealed that over 80% of Cypriot hairdressers suffered from musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) as a result of their profession.

*“OiRA helps to improve the working conditions in the workplace for micro and small enterprises, systematically reducing risks to workers, implementing legislation and reducing the current administrative burdens”*

Focus was first placed in this sector, within the framework of EU-OSHA's "Healthy Workplace Initiative" campaign for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in 2007, when the DLI decided to focus on OSH for Hairdressers and distribute a handbook on MSDs in hairdressing schools. In 2008 it joined the Technical Committee for the development of the Cyprus Vocational Qualification for Hairdressers, which included, for the first time, a module on health and safety training. This marked an important step forward in the control of OSH standards and in reaching employees of the hairdressing sector at the outset of their careers.



The President of the Pancyprian Federation of Hairdressers and Barbers (of which the Hairdressers' Association is part), Mr. Stavros Demetriou, said that the Federation is well organised and was always keen to improve the levels of safety and health at work in the hairdressing sector. The licensing of hairdressers is governed by legislation, it has its own OSH inspectors and moreover, the association asked for the help of the Labour Inspectorate to improve workplace health and safety in hairdressing salons. This proved to be the catalyst for the creation of a specific OiRA tool for the hairdressing sector.

### Shaping the tool

The first step in creating the sector-specific tool was engaging social partners. To this end a meeting was arranged with the Hairdressers' Association where the OiRA tool was presented by

EU-OSHA and the DLI. The meeting engaged the association with the tool and having the key social partners involved from the very outset helped facilitate its development through a cooperative approach.

Following this meeting, the OiRA tool was explained in further detail to the board members of the Hairdressers' Association where the modules to be covered by the hairdressing-specific tool were outlined and agreed jointly.

The careful initial planning and collective approach with the Hairdressers' Association helped to ensure that the development, led by the DLI, was a straight-forward process which took approximately eight weeks.

The creation of the tool followed a simple process: first the structure was decided. Then the type and number of modules and sub-modules to be included were selected, outlining what sort of information should be incorporated and the list of questions and statements to be covered. In the final phase the presentation of the tool was followed by thorough pilot testing.

*“I personally assumed responsibility for developing the tool and defining the approach,” says Mr Charalambous. “I was in charge of the necessary groundwork that resulted in a completed tool that is comprehensive, user-friendly and has a large capacity for storing and*

<sup>2</sup><https://osha.europa.eu/en/teaser/hairdressing-sector-agrees-on-new-measures-to-improve-health-and-safety-standards>

*archiving information. The development was easy as the tool is very simple to use. Its interactivity is also important as it facilitates any updates and changes at a later stage if required."*

### Hairdressers' Reception

After the development of the tool, the first stage was to present the tool to the members of the board of the Hairdressers' Association.

Then it was presented locally during seminars organised in all districts, with some 500 participants, for pilot testing to ascertain that the tool is:

- Easy to use
- Relevant to their needs
- Prepared in understandable language
- Efficient in that the preparation of a RA based on the tool does not take too much time

The reception of the tool was enthusiastic and the feedback very positive. To build on this momentum and ensure uptake of the tool, the DLI provided training on the tool to the Hairdressers' Association inspectors, in order to be able to provide assistance to the hairdressers. Then DLI organised the publication of relevant articles in the Hairdressers' Association magazine in order to raise awareness of the tool among its target end users.



The hairdressing tool is now online and many employers and self-employed workers in the sector use it to prepare the risk assessment of their workplaces. The tool aids every employer and employee to have access to all information concerning OSH at a hairdressing salon as provided by the legislation. In this way, they become aware of the risks they are exposed to and learn to prevent future health problems both for themselves and their customers (i.e. third persons at the workplace).

To date a promising number of users have registered for the tool, with the DLI monitoring the usage of the tool by participating companies. All signs point to a strong uptake and interest in the tool, ensuring that risks in the sector are fully considered – and moreover avoided in the future to make the sector safer and healthier to work in.

### Final set

Experiences in Cyprus demonstrated that the most important step in creating a tool is ensuring that all social partners become aware of the tool from the very outset to make sure they are engaged throughout the development process.

Hence, in creating the tool it was important to:

- Provide simple information, easy to transfer to a broader group of users
- Provide the users with specific and relevant information, as well as guidance on which they can base a decision.
- Provide helpful information for companies, to implement the legal requirements on risk assessment
- Provide a less resource-demanding and effective option on OSH for companies
- Develop a user-friendly tool, so that each hairdresser needs the least time possible (3–4 hours) for the preparation of his/her risk assessment

The successful outcomes of the development of the OiRA tool for hairdressers prompted the DLI to continue with the creation of further tools to support Cypriot SMEs, including a "working in offices" tool focusing on the Public Service Sector in Cyprus, and similar tools for the car repair and wood working sectors.

For more information on the OiRA tools currently available, visit:

<http://www.oiraproject.eu/available-tools>

or contact Lorenzo Munar at [munar@osha.europa.eu](mailto:munar@osha.europa.eu)

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