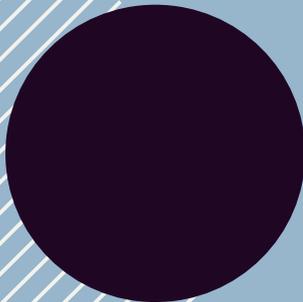
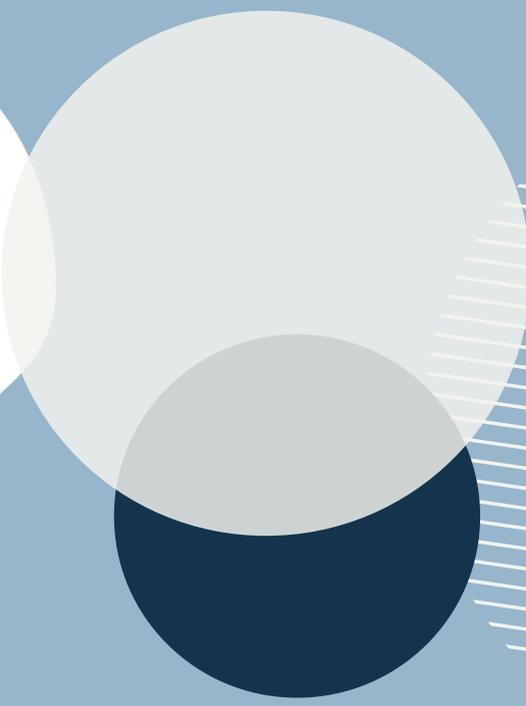




# OSH4EDU: EUROPEAN SECTORAL SOCIAL PARTNERS IN EDUCATION ENHANCING RISK ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

## FINAL PROJECT REPORT



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Project description

This project “**OSH4Edu: European sectoral social partners in education enhancing risk assessment in education institutions**” was designed to continue the work of the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) on the occupational health and safety (OSH) in the education sector. In 2019, the European Social Partners in education developed an Online Interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tool for the [early childhood education and care](#) and [secondary education](#) sector, in cooperation with the European Agency for Occupational Health and Safety (EU-OSHA). The tool is intended to facilitate the systematic and thorough assessment of risks in education institutions of all sizes by the staff member(s) responsible or interested in risk assessment. It aims to help employers to develop an action plan to prevent and combat these risks, in alignment with European legislation, and in close consultation with education staff and their union representatives, who understand their workplaces better than anyone else. The online tool is furthermore designed to be adjustable to take account of national settings, and of the circumstances of each individual workplace.

The activities implemented under the scope of the project were organized by an Advisory Group consisting of ETUCE and EFEE members from Ireland (ACCS), Slovenia (ESTUS and ZRVS) and Portugal (SINDEP).

Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, all the project events were held online. Two interactive workshops, the first hosted from Slovenia dedicated to southern European countries and the second hosted from Ireland dedicated to northern European countries - brought together more than 60 educational social partners from EFEE and ETUCE network. The workshops showcased the possibilities for the implementation of OiRA tools into national settings and facilitated the exchange of expertise, knowledge and best practices in the use of risk assessments. A final conference was also organised to disseminate the findings of the project, explore the possibilities for an EFEE/ETUCE Joint Statement in which the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education should commit themselves to the promotion of the implementation of OiRA tools in Education and calling for the need to develop tools specific for the VET and Higher Education & Research sectors in coming years.

## 1.2. Project Objectives

The project aims firstly, to contribute to the employment, social and economic challenges as identified in the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>1</sup>, in particular the principles on “Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment”. In this principle it is stated that workers have the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work, and the right to a working environment adapted to their professional needs (which enables them to prolong their participation in the labour market). As clearly described in the Commission Communication on “Safer and Healthier work for All”<sup>2</sup> investment in occupational

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<sup>1</sup> [European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, 17 November 2017.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Safer And Healthier Work For All - Modernisation Of The EU Occupational Safety And Health Legislation An](#)

safety and health has an important role to play in improving people's lives by preventing work-related illness and accidents and also has a tangible positive effect on EU economies. In order to make good health and safety management a reality, risk assessments of the workplace are crucial, as stated in the EU 'OSH Framework Directive'(89/391/EEC)<sup>3</sup>. A quality risk assessment - that is supported by the employer and staff – has the potential to enhance wellbeing of staff and to create a positive, safe and healthy work culture.

Secondly, it aims at actively implementing and promoting the [Work Programme 2020-2021 of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education \(ESSDE\)](#). The project also contributed to advancing the joint work on the selected theme of “promoting occupational health and safety in education”. Furthermore, the specific objectives of the project were:

- To provide a concrete example of a risk assessment tool (OiRA), jointly developed by education employers and trade unions, aspiring to contribute to safer and healthier working environments in the education sector in Europe;
- To raise awareness on OSH in the education sector;
- To raise the level of OSH in education workplaces;
- To promote the implementation of ESSDE OiRA tool;
- To explore the use of risk assessments work on health and safety challenges in education institutions;
- To promote social dialogue in education by sharing practices and fostering peer learning;
- To develop an ESSDE joint statement.

### 1.3. Purpose of the Final Report

Throughout the project a number of deliverables were prepared including presentations and minutes for both workshops, as well as a survey mapping the participants practices on risks assessments. It foresaw also a final conference report and a Joint Statement. This report draws on all these outputs, summarising the key findings of the project.

General principles concerning the prevention and protection of workers against occupational hazards and diseases lay in the EU “OSH Framework Directive 89/391/EEC”<sup>4</sup>. This core EU legislation applies to all sectors, including education and training and contains basic obligation for employers and workers. On the basis of the Framework Directive a series of 19 individual directives were adopted covering specific hazards and diseases, such as asbestosis. Establishing a strong social Europe, including a new strategic framework on OSH has become a political priority for the European Commission, as underlined in its 2021 work programme<sup>5</sup> and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan<sup>6</sup>. Building on the previous EU Strategic Framework on Health & Safety at Work 2014-2020, the new strategy will

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<sup>3</sup> [COUNCIL DIRECTIVE of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work \( 89 / 391 /EEC\).](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [European Commission, “Commission Work Programme 2021. A Union of vitality in a world of fragility”, 19 October 2020, COM\(2020\) 690 final.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, 4 March 2021.](#)

apply for the period 2021-2027 and aims to be more concise and to offer a more significant role to social partners to facilitate the national transposition of the directive which is of crucial importance in order to enhance the health and safety of learners, teachers and trainers.

## 2. The role of European Sectoral Social Partners in Education in promoting risk assessments to tackle health and safety challenges (including psychosocial hazards)

### 2.1. OiRA tools in education: benefits, practices and recommendations

To reach the main objective of the project, namely, to raise the level of awareness on OiRA tools at the national level, the workshops organised in the framework of the project foresaw the participation of EU-OSHA, the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work. On the EU-level, the development of OiRA tools includes both Social Partners and national partners. The OiRA tools are free for use to all interested stakeholders, content can be copied and modified by users according to the national needs as there is not copyright, they also guarantee anonymity in use as personal data is not collected or shared.

The two workshops held within the project showcased how to concretely use OiRA tools. In fact, tool users are led through various stages of assessment. First, the stage of risk identification, consisting of modules of risks and an optional added custom risk to be added. Secondly, the elaboration of a concrete action plan, implying matters of responsibility and a budget plan. And thirdly and lastly, the evaluation of the assessment in the form of an overview of measures to combat and prevent the identified health and safety hazards for the educational institution.

OiRA tools were developed with objective to create a national tool out of the social sectoral EU- OiRA-tool, in accordance with national specificities and practices such as national language and laws - already transposed from EU Directives. EU-OSHA supports national partners, such as ministries of labor by providing a software called “OIRA tools generator”, being available in 17 languages and assists its national partners in the development process of OiRA. EU-OSHA provides assistance in the development of the software, as well as its maintenance.

EU-OSHA figures illustrate the success of the OIRA tools cross-sectors. From January 2021, 241 tools were online, 61 tools in 2020 and more than 85 tools are still under development and to be updated by national partners.

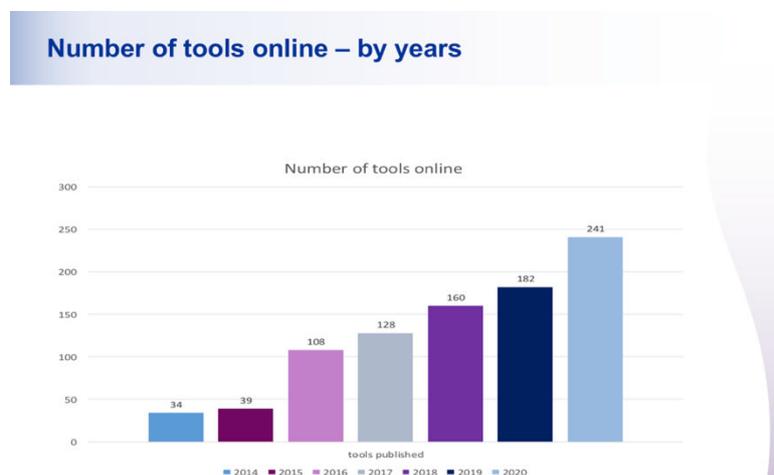


Figure 1 Micheala Seifert (EU-OSHA) - Risk assessment: online and interactive with OiRA, 5 November 2020.

Moreover, OiRA tools are constantly updated with new features, which might be of interest for social partners. An OiRA Covid-19 tool was developed to provide general information related to the Covid-19 pandemic in the EU. The tool covers information on general management, workplace management, hygienic behaviour, commuting and travel to work.

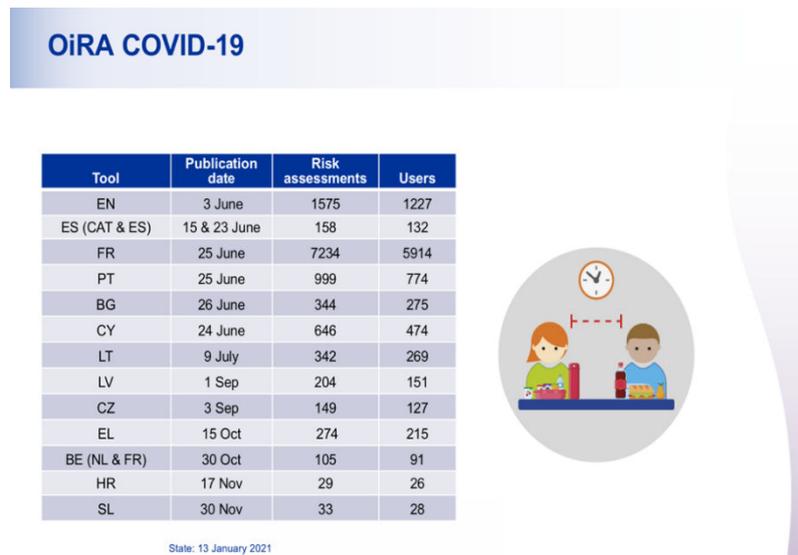


Figure 2 Micheala Seifert (EU-OSHA) - Risk assessment: online and interactive with OiRA, 27 January 2021.

In the framework of the project EFEE and ETUCE collected between November 2020 and April 2021 qualitative data, from 39 respondents from 17 European countries, including, Bulgaria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom and all education levels, with the objective to map their overall practices in conducting risks assessments within their institutions.

When carrying out risk assessments in general, the main occupational hazards and risks jeopardizing health and safety within their education institution were for risks related to Covid-19” (lack of social distancing, ventilation and other sanitary equipment), “Psychological risks (mental workload, stress, harassment)”, “Physical hazards (health issues, falls, lifting and moving load, aging, voice stress, MSDs)”, “Inappropriate working environment assessment (ergonomics, microclimate, lighting, noise, etc.)”and “Lack of transparency and communication in conducting the risk assessments”.

The two workshops hosted within this project also offered the opportunity for national social partners to share examples of good practices. As the two hosting partners to this project, Slovenia and Ireland, provided members with a specific introduction to their national best practices. Since 2012, the Slovenian Ministry of Labour has in cooperation with the social partners, adapted a various number of OSH tools specifically for the primary sector. In Ireland, however, OiRA tools are not the most commonly used. “Medmark4teachersna”, is the main Irish OSH service dedicated to schools for carrying out risk assessments, especially during Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, it was acknowledged that combining it with OiRA tools would allow the risk assessments to be more education specific.

According to the respondents, OiRA tools have been the most useful for identifying potential risks and hazards (including psychosocial hazards) and setting up the action plan, while OiRA tools have been judged less useful in supporting the organisation and coordination of risk assessments management and the implementation of the action plan.

In addition, 60% were aware of the OiRA tools developed by EFEE and ETUCE in collaboration with EU-OSHA. 67% were aware of the existence of an OiRA tool at national or local level ahead of the workshop. Among the respondents already aware of the OiRA tool, 56% never used a national or local

OiRA tool to carry out a risk assessment within their institutions. 33% never used or heard about the existence of any OiRA tool in their country, 9% were aware of the existence of an OiRA tool but not in the education sector. 50% of the respondents were informed about the existence of OiRA tools by European social partners in education, 25% through EU-OSHA, 19% by national or local government and 6% at their workplace.

Despite the increasing development of OiRA tools, the survey outcomes underline that a lack of or weak social dialogue in education at national or local level on the one hand as well as a lack of awareness on the other hand are the main obstacles that social partners have encountered when getting involved into the design process of national OiRA tool. Against this background, the survey highlighted that only in 52,9% of cases the social partners were involved in the development of the OiRA tool at national level. This statement was also voiced by the participants during the interactive workshops. Hence, to further promote the use of OiRA tools in education, all stakeholders need to engage in various actions, guidance, campaigns leading to the improvement overall quality of education, working environment and conditions and quality social dialogue at all levels needs to be supported.

Furthermore, the main obstacles encountered to effectively implementing OiRA tools within national settings, include also its roll-out. For instance, when OiRA tools are not recognized by the national ministries, it is the role of the national social partners to take the initiative to implement the OiRA tool. Even though successful other tools might be already developed, the main advantage of the OiRA tools is to be education specific. More synergy is therefore required between all stakeholders, including social partners and government. Against this background, a lack of or weak social dialogue in education at national or local level on the one hand as well as a lack of awareness on the other hand are the main obstacles that social partners have encountered when getting involved into the design process of national OiRA tool.

For the future development of any possible OiRA tools, a bottom-up approach, should be adopted, involving the teachers and learners in the process and further considering their inputs. On the same track, to give to OiRA a legitimate character, other social partners and relevant stakeholders including governments, inspection on work and inspection on education, schoolboard, internal and external prevention advisors and trade unions should be consulted in the development process. Furthermore, the impact of previous education reforms before introducing further change should also be taken into account. To improve the comprehension and make OiRA tools more user-friendly, the survey participants proposed to develop OiRA tool in a computer friendly or even mobile friendly way, so they could be adjusted in various work formats and various occupational hazards. Lastly, a bigger focus should be placed on psycho-social hazards in risk assessments in education institutions.

The project finally paved the way to the future development of an OiRA tool for the Higher Education & Research (HE&R) and the Vocational Education & Training (VET) sectors.

## 2.2. Development of an OiRA tool for the Higher Education & Research sector: challenges and opportunities

The sector of Higher Education & Research differs from other education fields as it contains a complex and diverse working environment in the form of labs, field work, researchers, administrative staff and students. Ensuring proper health and safety infrastructures in universities is thus of crucial importance in order to enhance health and safety conditions for all.

The interactive workshops participants were surveyed on the most important aspects that need to be taken into account when developing OiRA tool for HE&R. The psycho-social risks and the variety of education fields, staff and students were the most common responses. Moreover, it was highlighted that Covid-19 has brought forth some new additional issues such as practical arrangements in universities due to remote working and the increase of digitalization. Ergonomics in home working settings, or harassment on social media for instance has also become important aspects to take into consideration. Clear coordination between all levels of governance is therefore required when developing such a tool for the specific sector.

On the one hand, the main challenges when developing a tool for this sector, concern economic globalization due notably to the competitive pressure and the limitation of public budget. The second challenge is related to digitalization, including the datafication of learning, leading to private and ethical issues but also to innovative approaches such as the use of open education resources and open science. Thirdly, Covid-19 pandemic is the most important risk for HE&R at the moment. On the other hand, Universities are traditionally drivers of innovation and social progress and OSH can rely on a greater importance of health after the pandemic within the HE intuitions. Moreover, HE&R is the sector with the highest effectiveness for mainstreaming OSH. Universities can be seen as role models for decent and good work, empowering the future leaders

Overall, the Higher Education & Research sector seems to present less difficulties than the other sectors because students are adults and have more maturity. However, the variety of programs of study in HE&R adds to the complexity of occupational hazards which in some cases are extremely dangerous, especially when dealing with laboratories that have to do with radiation, toxic or biological waste, chemical substances should be taking heed of. Students should also be involved in the procedure and their needs taken into consideration. It was moreover highlighted that occupational safe and health regulations are still not clearly defined in Higher Education & Research. This concerns the well-being of teachers and students concerning psychosocial hazards as well as the employment legislation of professors

Further discussion on the development of an OiRA tool for this sector will be held during the upcoming ESSDE Policy Working Group meetings on Higher Education & Research.

### 2.3. Development of an OiRA tool for the VET sector: challenges and opportunities

EFEE and ETUCE have worked actively, over the last years, in order to promote the safety and health of staff and students of the vocational education and training sector within the European Educational Sectoral Dialogue. Risk assessment is a key component to the well-being and performance of VET students, teachers, trainers and companies. However, this sector might also be more complex than the others regarding its working nature. In this regard, several concerns have been raised during the project activities.



#### **Challenges and opportunities for OiRA for VET**

- 1) OiRA takes the perspective of the training center, not the OSH perspective first
- 2) OiRA follows a participatory approach: Teachers and learners are involved in the development
- 3) OiRA is a learning tool; learners investigate e.g.
  - different aspects of vulnerability (their own age/age of their teachers, biographical background of migrants/former refugees, situation of colleagues with chronic diseases)
  - the risks & resources for safety, health, and wellbeing (e.g. trust in others and the organization)
- 4) OiRa is a tool to exercise critical, systems-oriented thinking, reflect ethical values, attitudes and behavior; work on their social and emotional skills including their resilience
- 5) OiRA promotes a culture of prevention in VET institutions



Figure 3-Ulrike Bollmann (ENETOSH) - Implementing OiRA into the VET sector, 27 January 2021.

First of all, OiRA tools are intended to be tools related to exclusively one specific sector, which cannot be applied to VET. Second, new emerging challenges have occurred, including the digital and green transitions, involving new demands on content and the working and learning environment. The digital transition also encompasses a changing learning based through simulators, virtual and augmented reality, home schooling, learning platforms, shared work- and learning spaces (e.g. driving simulator for bicycles, virtual environment for falling from height, data googles in warehouse management). To ensure the green transition, environmental and social sustainability aspects should be embedded into curricula and organizational management. Lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic has also caused disruption of the learning activities standards.

The project further reported among the challenges of developing OiRA tools for VET, an imbalance between Higher Education & Research on the one hand and VET on the other hand and the heterogeneity of the sector as well as need for digital upskilling of teacher trainers master craftsman's and instructors, and to develop coordinated and qualitative C-VET systems. In light of the fact that almost half of European adults have low or outdated skills, there is a need and opportunity to provide quality accessible and inclusive relevant and financially sustainable lifelong learning systems. This creates a window of opportunities for OiRA tools to offer a proper answer to the increased importance

of risk assessment in the education sector, assistance with integrating health and safety into online learning and working environment and contribute to support the physical and mental health of students.

To develop an effective OiRA tool for the VET sector, teachers and learners should be involved in the procedure. It should be furthermore built as a learning tool of critical thinking promoting a culture of prevention in VET institutions. The development of such a holistic tool might be feasible if social partners see OiRA as a participative e-learning tool and keep a clear focus and a systemic approach.

## Role of the Social partners

- Underline the **priority of VET** (Riga Conclusions 2015-2020)
- Strike for the **right balance between initial and continuing VET** (European Pillar of Social Rights 2017)
- Promote **OiRA for the VET sector** as an appropriate tool to cope with the challenges of the digital and green transition and the Covid-19 pandemic
  - as a OSH Management tool for VET training providers
  - as a participative e-learning tool
- Raise the interest of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (**ACSH**) and the Senior Labor Inspectorate (**SLIC**) on future-fit VET systems for 2030 (e.g. SLIC Thematic Day)

To summarize, an OiRA tool designed for the VET sector should be a dynamic instrument covering all aspects of safety hazards, encompass the different types of school organizations and target groups (primary, secondary, within secondary general education and vocational education) and provide all elements that are laid down in a safety law for vocational education with a clear focus on digital learning and working environments.

## 2.4. Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)

According to the EU agency on Occupational Safety and Health, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are one of the most common work-related ailments. Throughout Europe they affect millions of workers and consequently have a significant impact on the European economy. Tackling MSDs helps improve the lives of workers, but it also makes good business sense. Preventing work related MSDs can be done by conducting effective risks assessments and including workers and their representatives in dialogue on possible problems and solutions.

Against this background, EU-OSHA has launched a campaign “Lighten the Load 2020-22” focused on the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders, in which EFEE and ETUCE are active campaign partners. This decentralized campaign represents one of EU-OSHA’s flagship activities and aims at raising awareness on MSDs at the national level. Within the framework of this campaign a new study on the relationship between MSDs and different levels of education (MSDs and future generations) will be conducted.

## 2.5 Impact of Covid-19 on risk assessments

While this project was greatly influenced by the events of the Covid-19 pandemic, this crisis also provided a new impetus to the importance of health and safety at work. Against this backdrop, the focus of this project was slightly altered to include the impact of the pandemic on risk assessments in education institutions.

It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted risk assessment within the European education institution significantly. It has increased the need to undertake risk assessments for schools reopening after periods of lockdown, specifically considering the regularly revised prevention measures and restrictions within several Member States. Against this background many new procedures regarding health and safety in education institutions were furthermore established. Moreover, it has increased the relevance of occupational health and safety in the workplace as well as the importance of certain staff involved in safety (“safety manager”, “team leaders”, “prevention advisor” etc.). As a result, there are much more activities of education staff and work councils to monitor and pro-actively negotiate health and safety standards in education institutions. The pandemic has also resulted in increased individualised risk assessments e.g. for pregnant workers.

As an important highlight, it was stressed that teachers have experienced higher levels of distress due to the workload generated during the Covid-19 crisis as well as the mental burden of online teaching (and the lack of appropriate infrastructure). Due to quarantines, prolonged and repeated closures of schools and other education institutions, teachers as well as students have experienced a rising psycho-social load. There is furthermore a concern for student learning losses and the situation of the most vulnerable students. Lastly, the lack of real protective measures for workers and students besides masks in some education institutions was a real concern for OSH.

## Conclusions

The OSH4Edu project has shed the light on the crucial role social partners in promoting effective risk assessment in education institution at the national and European level. Safety, health and well-being at work and education are closely tight, as they are both fundamental rights. The project contributed to raise awareness on the importance of developing a culture of prevention during this particular time of Covid-19. Inspirational stories on the way to implement risk assessment as well as on the use of OiRA tools at the national level have been shared. The project has also demonstrated that Education is one of the most active sectors in promoting OiRA tools although several areas for improvement have been identified. In this light, 60% of participants to this project stated that the project had a significant positive impact on their knowledge of OiRA tools and risk assessments in general. While this may seem like a small percentage, it should be noted that the remaining 40% were already aware of these tools and therefore perceived the project as helpful but it didn't impact their knowledge in a substantial manner.

As a result, ETUCE and EFEE jointly draft a Statement, taking into consideration the main recommendations raised during the project closing conference. The Statement will be presented to the ESSDE Plenary in December 2021 and EFEE and ETUCE will ensure these points are included in the forthcoming European Strategic framework for Safety and Health at Work 2021-2027. This project lastly opened the door to the development of an OiRA tool for the Higher Education & Research sector, in collaboration with EU-OSHA.

## **General recommendations to promote the implementation of online interactive risk assessment tools**

As an outcome of the project EFEE and ETUCE, jointly drafted a statement entitled “European Social Partners in Education to promote the implementation of online interactive risk assessment tools in education institutions”, with the main objective of promoting the OiRA tools and preventing hazards to ensure healthy and safe working and learning environments. The main recommendations to take in order to overcome the barriers to the national implementation of the tool can be found below.

- Increase the awareness raising of risk assessment tools and opportunities at European, national, regional and local level.
- Promote the integration of occupational safety and health as a cornerstone of the European Education Area.
- Create an environment for education institutions and education stakeholders in Europe to share knowledge, best practices and bottom-up approaches to OSH related problems.
- Provide sufficient and sustainable support to education institutions in adequately performing risk assessments within their context. Against this backdrop, ensuring sustainable and targeted investment in quality education and the training of both employers and employees in the use of these tools as well as for the implementation of the action plan at all levels to ensure healthy and safe education institutions as providers of quality education is indispensable. Involving the entire community by providing training for school leaders, teachers, academics, other education personnel, and students alike is essential in achieving these objectives.
- Appeal to all EU Member States to commit themselves to making these tools available in their national language or languages. In this light, we encourage all stakeholders to call for more funding that should be made available to adapt and translate these tools into their national context.
- Call on the National OiRA Partners to support the initiatives of the sectoral social partners in transposing the tools into national languages and legal norms, as well as in their implementation and broad dissemination. Against this background, we urge the national OiRA partners to enhance their collaboration with the sectoral social partners at the regional and local level as they will be responsible for the implementation of these tools. In case no national OiRA partner would already be clearly available, we encourage the Member States to identify these focal points accordingly.

- Increase the synergy between all stakeholders (including federal government of employment, education units, prevention units, as well as labour inspectorates within education departments, etc.) at the national level.
- Support and facilitate the professionalisation of OSH experts and other risk assessment education personnel. Seeing as the application of prevention measures requires a risk assessment, the function of the prevention advisor has come more into focus during the recent Covid-19 crisis.
- Build upon already existing structures and continuously improve certain elements of the existing OiRA tools, most specifically the reporting of incidents, the implementation of the action plan, its report and evaluation.
- Include psycho-social hazards alongside more traditional hazards as a key risk factor to occupational safety and health within the education sector. Creating respectful working environments within education institutions will lead to the overall improvement of quality education on the one hand as well as emotional and physical commitment of school staff on the other hand. In turn, this will result in a higher attractiveness of the job as well as improved recruitment and retention of teachers, academics and other education personnel.

**Moreover, the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education commit to:**

- Explore the possibilities of jointly developing an online risk assessment OiRA tool for the Higher Education & Research sector with the support of the European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (EU-OSHA).
- Create a culture of awareness surrounding the implementation of OiRA tools in European education institutions. We herewith underline the importance of creating an embedded culture of safety and risk management with legislative underpinning in all European education institutions.
- Continue dedicating ourselves to enhancing work environments in education through promoting and actively engaging ourselves to cross-sectoral initiatives including the [Joint Statement on the 10th anniversary of the Multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work](#) as well as the EU-OSHA's "[Healthy Workplaces - Lighten the Load 2020-22](#)" Campaign.

# OSH RISK ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION

## 1. HIGHLIGHTS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL HAZARDS



### INTRODUCTION

Psychological hazards are any hazard that affects the mental well-being or mental health of the worker by overwhelming individual coping mechanisms and impacting the worker's ability to work in a healthy and safe manner.

According to EU-OSHA's data around "half of European workers consider stress to be common in their work-place". It also affects the education sector, the survey recently conducted jointly by ETUCE and EFEE in the framework of OSH4EDU project, shows that 31% of the respondents identified "psychosocial hazards" as the main occupational hazard jeopardizing health and safety within their education institution.

A EU-OSHA survey on "new and emerging risks (ESNER)" from 2019, finds that "psychological risks are believed to be more challenging and more difficult to manage than 'traditional' occupational safety and health risks". The outcome of the OSH4EDU project, also attests these findings with regards to schools. It has been concluded that psychosocial hazards prevention

should be at the center of attention of all education institutions. There is a need for raising awareness and simple practical tools facilitating dealing with work-related stress, violence and harassment, in particular in light of the lack of European legislation addressing the well-being of teachers, trainers and students.

### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES ?

Psychosocial risks arise from poor work design, organisation and management, as well as a poor social context of work, and they may result in negative psychological, physical and social outcomes such as work-related stress, burnout or depression. Some examples of working conditions leading to psychosocial risks are:

- Excessive workloads
- Conflicting demands and lack of role clarity



- Lack of involvement in making decisions that affect the worker and lack of influence over the way the job is done
- Poorly managed organisational change, job insecurity
- Ineffective communication, lack of support from management or colleagues
- Psychological and sexual harassment, third party violence

### HOW TO MANAGE AND PREVENT THE RISKS?

Interventions to prevent and manage stress are often categorised into one of three levels of interventions: primary, secondary and tertiary.

Primary-level interventions, are concerned with taking action to modify or eliminate sources of stress (i.e., psychosocial risks) inherent in the workplace and work environment, thus reducing their negative impact on the individual or reduce exposure to them.

Secondary-level interventions are concerned with the detection and management of experienced stress, and the enhancement of workers' ability to more effectively manage stressful conditions by increasing their awareness,

knowledge, skills and coping resources.

Tertiary-level interventions have been described as reactive strategies in that they are seen as a curative approach to stress management for those individuals suffering from ill-health as a result of stress.

Overall, stress management and prevention must involve the development of strategies that comprehensively address the antecedents of work stress (psychosocial and organisational hazards) and their effects on employee health.



### OIRA TOOLS & PSYCHOLOGICAL HAZARDS PREVENTION

The participants surveyed during both workshops organised for the OSH4EDU project, have in majority found that OiRA tools have been the most useful for identifying potential risks and hazards -including psychosocial hazards.

OiRA tools indeed provide advice and guidance on how to prevent psychological – “psycho-social risks”. The E-guide can be found [here](#).



# OSH RISK ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION

## 2. COVID-19: A NEW OSH RISK



### INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how crucial OSH is for protecting workers and the continuity of essential services such as education. In fact, according to a Eurofound survey, "education really sticks out as working from home, especially tertiary education" and the sector is "the third sector who felt the most drained during the pandemic".

The OSH4EDU project shed the light on how the pandemic impacted risk assessment within education institution:

- It has notably increased the need to undertake risk assessments for schools reopening after periods of lockdown, specifically considering the regularly revised prevention measures and restrictions within several Member States. Against this background many new procedures regarding health and safety in education institutions were established.

- It has increased the relevance of occupational health and safety in the workplace as well as the importance of certain staff involved in safety ("safety manager", "team leaders", "prevention advisor" etc.). As a result, there are much more activities of staff and work councils to monitor and proactively negotiate health and safety standards in education institutions.
- It has resulted in increased individualised risk assessments e.g. for pregnant workers and those who were shielding.
- Teachers have experienced higher levels of distress due to the workload generated during the Covid-19 crises as well as the mental burden of online teaching (and the lack of appropriate infrastructure). Due to quarantines, prolonged and repeated closures of schools and other education institutions are taking a rising psycho-social load on teachers as well as students. There is furthermore a concern for student learning losses and the situation of the most



- Constant sitting work using PC for teaching negatively affected eyesight, as well as muscular systems.
- The lack of real protective measures for workers and students besides masks.

### RISK ASSESMENT PRACTICES DURING COVID-19

The project activities further foster the exchange of best practices on how to perform effective and comprehensive risk assessment. It was noted that most of the stakeholders were not prepared to cope with such a situation including the schools closure which occurred almost in all European countries during the first phase of the outbreak. In Portugal for instance, the responsibility lies on the public sector and there is not a lot of inspection or mandatory risk assessment, which has led to great discrepancies between different schools. In Ireland they could remedy to it, partly through establishing a dialogue between social partners and the adoption of a plan by every school in the country. It was also underlined that all the different OSH practices should be integrated in the risk assessment to get rid of the silo mentality.



### OIRA TOOLS & COVID-19

OIRA tools are continuously updated, in particular with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic and new models and risks are being included. The OIRA tools are a crucial addition to moving beyond the Covid-19 pandemic although further steps need to be taken in order to overcome the barrier to national implementation, including, enhanced translation into national languages, closer collaboration between OIRA national partners, EU-OSHA and all relevant stakeholders.

EU-OSHA also offers EU guidance on going "back to the workplace" on their [website](#).

# OSH RISK ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION

## 3. AN OIRA TOOL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION & RESEARCH

### INTRODUCTION

One of OSH4EDU project's objectives was to explore the challenges and opportunities for the development of an OIRA tool for the Higher Education and Research sector.

It has been highlighted in the course of the project that universities are traditionally drivers of innovation and social progress and OSH can rely on a greater importance of health after the pandemic within the HE&R institutions. Moreover, HE&R is the sector with the highest effectiveness for mainstreaming OSH.

The main challenges concerns the economic globalization, due notably to the competitive pressure, "universities are moving from academic to economic competition", but also the limitation of public budget, the digitalisation, including the datafication of learning, the variety of programs of study and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the sector.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINAL SURVEY

Against this background, EFEE and ETUCE secretariat conducted a survey amongst their member to gather their inputs for the future development of an OIRA tool for the Higher Education and Research sector. The respondents were from 13 European countries and suggested to take into consideration:

- The unique and sometimes high risk conditions that have to do with programs of study that involve High Tech, AI, Robotics, Chemical Substances, High Radiation, Nuclear Energy etc.
- The uncertainty of employment in the sector (large degree of fix term contracts) making difficult to perform risk assessment activities in a efficient way.
- Pay attention to engage all education stakeholders-including students- in the procedure and further take in consideration their needs, in a mentoring strategy and review the strategy at regular intervals including the autonomy of the Higher Education & Research sector.

