

## **Joint Statement on Promoting the Implementation of OiRA tools in Education Institutions by the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education**

The risk assessment of the workplace is one of the cornerstones of good health and safety management, and is therefore a legal obligation for the employer, as clearly stated in article 9.1. of the EU [‘OSH Framework Directive’ \(89/391/EEC\)](#). In light of this, the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) as social partners in education see it as our joint responsibility to support the creation of an atmosphere where students can learn and teachers and other members of staff in education can carry out their work in a decent, healthy and safe environment. Following the joint work on the [ESSDE Joint Declaration on “Preventing and Combating Psychosocial Hazards in the Education Sector” \(2016\)](#), the [Joint Practical Guidelines on How to Promote Joint Social Partner Initiatives at European, National, Regional and Local Level to Prevent and Combat Psychosocial Hazards in Education \(September 2016\)](#), the [Joint Statement on the 10th anniversary of the Multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work \(July 2010\)](#) as well as the collaboration on the EU-OSHA’s [“Healthy Workplaces - Lighten the Load 2020-22” Campaign](#), the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education, in cooperation with the European Agency for Occupational Health and Safety (EU-OSHA), therefore developed an Online Interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tool for the [early childhood education sector](#) and for the [secondary education sector](#) in 2019. The social partners in education decided to begin with these sectors, aware that this risk assessment tool not only makes education institutions a safer and healthier place for those who work there, it also has the effect of promoting preventive behaviours among children and young people, behaviours that they later can carry into their workplaces when actively starting their professional life. 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. It aims to help employers jointly with staff and their union representatives, who understand their workplaces better than anyone else to develop an action plan to identify, prevent and combat these risks, in alignment with European legislation. The online tool is furthermore designed to be adjustable to take account of national settings, and of the circumstances of each individual workplace.

Nevertheless, there remains a big discrepancy between the availability of these OiRA tools and their effective implementation in education institutions. Taking this into consideration, the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education have jointly carried out the project ‘OSH4Edu: European Sectoral Social Partners in Education enhancing Risk Assessment in Education Institutions’ from 2020 to 2021. With this project, EFEE and ETUCE aim to raise awareness on occupational safety and health (OSH) in the education sector (from primary and secondary education up to Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education), by examining the use of risk assessments to tackle health and safety challenges in education institutions (including psychosocial hazards), by promoting the implementation of the jointly developed OiRA tool and by exploring the opportunities to further

develop an OiRA tool for the VET and Higher Education level. The project is supported by the European Commission.

**Against this background and in light of the upcoming ‘Occupational Safety and Health Strategic Framework 2021-2027’, the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education deem it as crucial to:**

- Increase the awareness raising of risk assessment tools and opportunities at European, national, regional and local level. In this regard, improving communication channels and promotional activities surrounding OiRA tools is of crucial importance, especially in a post-Covid-19 era.
- Promote the integration of occupational safety and health as a cornerstone of the European Education Area. Seeing as healthy and safe education institutions are a prerequisite for quality and inclusive education, we deem it as paramount to aim for a common approach with regards to occupational safety and health in education across all Member States and across all education levels. Developing a clear understanding on OSH terminologies is crucial in this regard as different terms used across Member States can be confusing for staff aiming to implement or use these tools.
- Create an environment for education institutions and education stakeholders in Europe to share knowledge, best practices and bottom-up approaches to OSH related problems. In this regard, we deem it as crucial that data on OSH-related topics within education is made available in order to substantiate and facilitate this exchange of experiences.
- 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 that more funding 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 are 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. As there is a clear need for an integrated and comprehensive sector-based approach to OSH strategies within education, we encourage all

stakeholders to collaboratively engage in various actions, guidance and campaigns to develop and promote the OiRA tools, with the ultimate aim to enhance the quality of education, and promote fair working environment and conditions, high attractiveness of the profession, recruitment and retention of teachers. Taking this into consideration, we underline that the success of the effective implementation of EU-OiRA tools on the national level is furthermore dependent on the active involvement of as well as collaboration and the trust between the sectoral social partners in education.

- Support and facilitate the professionalisation of OSH experts and other risk assessment education personnel. Seeing 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. As this pandemic has clearly underlined the pivotal role that this education personnel with OSH expertise plays in the functioning of education institutions, we deem it as paramount that they are given a formal recognition as well as adequate funding.
- 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. OiRA tools should be easy to comprehend and to use as well as be flexible enough to be implemented in different education institutions. Against this background, we furthermore underline that risk assessment tools should be regularly updated taking into consideration the rapidly changing digital technologies.
- Include psycho-social hazards as a key risk factor to occupational safety and health within the education sector. Creating respectful working environments within education improves the overall quality of education on the one hand as well as emotional and physical commitment of school staff on the other hand. In turn, this results in a higher attractiveness of the profession 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). As the Higher Education & Research sector encompasses a variety of study fields and programmes, as well as students, academic staff and researchers from diverse backgrounds in the education and research process, it is subject to more complex and diverse occupational risks. The European Sectoral Social Partners in Education therefore deem it crucial that this sector develops its independent OiRA tool.
- 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.

This statement has been adopted by the ESSDE Plenary on 15 December 2021.

Brussels, 15 December 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Wisniewski'.

Daniel Wisniewski  
General Secretary, EFEE

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Flocken'.

Susan Flocken  
European Director, ETUCE