



# **Peer Review on the “Use of web-based tools for OSH risk assessment”**

**Dublin, Ireland, 2-3 October 2017**

## **Synthesis Report**

Written by ICF  
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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Unit B3

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## **Synthesis Report**

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Peer Review on the “Use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment”

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## **Table of Contents**

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	Background and purpose of the Peer Review.....	1
1.2	European policy context .....	2
2	Overview of the host country policy/ practice: The Irish approach to OSH risk assessment.....	6
3	National approaches to the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment .....	8
4	Benefits and drawbacks of WBTs.....	11
5	Challenges and success factors to widespread use of WBTs .....	13
6	Conclusions and recommendations.....	15

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background and purpose of the Peer Review

Risk assessment (RA) is one of the cornerstones of an enterprise strategy to ensure occupational health and safety, to prevent workplace accidents and work-related illnesses. It is also a requirement set out in the Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) Framework Directive (Directive 1989/391/EEC), which enshrines the principle of prevention in legislation. RA comprises the process of evaluating workplace hazards and risks to workers' safety and health. The assessment of OSH risks includes the identification of who may be at risk (e.g. employees, visitors, contractors, sub-contractors, the public, etc.), identifying and ensuring that all relevant risks are taken into account (also those risks that are not immediate or obvious), creating awareness of hazards and risks at the workplace, setting up the preventive and protective measures, checking the efficiency of the control measures adopted and documenting the outcomes of the RA. They must be carried out regularly and updated as necessary. Under the Framework Directive it is the responsibility of the employer to ensure the safety and health of workers in every aspect related to the work. The Directive also places great emphasis on information, consultation and the participation of workers.

Investing in OSH is crucial. It improves people's lives by preventing work-related illnesses and accidents<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, investing in OSH has a positive effect on businesses and the EU economy by reducing costs and improving business productivity and performance. For example, different studies prove that the employer will have a return that is double that of the investment in OSH<sup>2</sup>.

The need for a simple, clear and cost effective way to ensure compliance with the legislation and to foster a positive safety and health culture - especially among micro and small enterprises (MSEs) – has led to the development and use of web-based tools (hereinafter referred to as "WBTs") for OSH risk assessment<sup>3</sup>. This is particularly important as SMEs make up around 99.8% of non-financial enterprises in the EU<sup>4</sup>. WBTs can also help companies and public administrations in reducing financial costs and administrative burdens, as well as facilitate compliance.

Nevertheless, there are several challenges associated with the use of WBTs, including technological requirements for development and maintenance costs, dissemination, copyright and data protection issues.

All these issues were presented and discussed during the Peer Review (PR) on 2-3 October 2017 in Dublin, hosted by the Irish Health and Safety Authority. The PR brought together government representatives and independent experts from eight additional countries, namely Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Slovenia, Portugal and Sweden. Other participants included a thematic expert, a host country expert, the

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<sup>1</sup> Cancer for example constitutes the first cause of work-related deaths in the EU, in 2012 between 57,700 and 106,500 cancer deaths were attributed to work-related exposure to carcinogenic substances. The direct costs of work-related cancer in terms of healthcare and productivity losses amount at least to some 4-7 billion EUR per year. The indirect costs are likely to be approximately 334 billion EUR (from 242 billion to 440 billion) each year. Available at: <http://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/rapporten/2016-0010.pdf> [last accessed November 2017]

<sup>2</sup> International Social Security Association, (2013) *Calculating the international return on prevention for companies: costs and benefits of investments in occupational safety and health*. Available at: [http://www.swiss-safety.ch/sites/default/files/dateiablage/Kampagne\\_250/2-ROP-FINAL\\_en.pdf](http://www.swiss-safety.ch/sites/default/files/dateiablage/Kampagne_250/2-ROP-FINAL_en.pdf) [last accessed November 2017]; European Commission, (2011). *Socio-economic costs of accidents and work and work-related ill-health*. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7416&langId=en> [last accessed November 2017]

<sup>3</sup> A web-based tool is a piece of software that: a) can run on the internet, on a computer, on a phone or any other electronic device; b) is interactive because it requires some active decision-making from the user, and c) guides the user through the process (as opposed to a static or passive instrument such as traditional factsheets or checklists).

<sup>4</sup> EU-OSHA, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/safety-and-health-micro-and-small-enterprises> [last accessed November 2017]

European Commission, the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work (EU-OSHA), as well as representatives from employers, workers and Government Interest Group of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work.

In particular, the PR discussed national approaches and good practices in the use of WBTs for OSH RA, including their benefits and drawbacks, the reasons for any remaining resistance in their use and the main challenges and success factors in reaching the largest number of users and sectors. The contribution of WBTs to reduce the perceived administrative burden of OSH RA, and the effectiveness and impact of such tools were also addressed. The PR discussed the relationship between these tools and online learning, as well as the challenges of changing technologies and updating of these tools, and finally explored benefits and drawbacks of embedding the use of these tools in legislation.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 1.2 provides the European policy context on OSH and RA, as well as the Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tools.
- Section 2 presents the national approach from the host country (Ireland) with regards to the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment.
- Section 3 presents the national approaches from the peer countries with regards to the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment.
- Section 4 considers the main benefits and shortcomings associated with the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment in general.
- Section 5 discusses the main challenges and success factors.
- Section 6 concludes and provides some future recommendations.

## 1.2 European policy context

In 2014, in Europe there were almost 3.2 million non-fatal accidents resulting in at least four calendar days of absence from work and 3,739 fatal accidents. For the same period, Agilis estimates that 7.4% of the EU-28 population suffered from one or more work related health problems<sup>5</sup>.

EU-OSHA, together with the ILO, have presented new estimates of the cost of poor OSH management. The findings reveal that worldwide work-related injury and illness result in the loss of 3.9% of GDP, at an annual cost of approximately EUR 2,680 billion, and for the EU 3.3% of GDP (EUR 476 billion).

OSH RA can play a pivotal role in reducing workplace accidents and ensuring a healthy and compliant work environment. The most important piece of European legislation on the prevention of occupational risks is the Framework Directive 89/391/EEC complemented by more than 25 related Directives. Directive 89/391/EEC states clearly the obligations and the responsibility of the employer with regards to safety and health at work: "The employer shall have the duty to ensure the safety and health of the workers in every aspect related to the work"<sup>6</sup>. It also stipulates several measures that the employer has to carry out in order to fulfil his legal responsibility for occupational health and safety, the most important being<sup>7</sup>:

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<sup>5</sup> Agilis, S. A., (2015). *Statistics and informatics*. Final statistical report on the quality assessment and statistical analysis of the 2013 ad hoc module. 2015. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/1978984/6037334/Evaluation\\_report\\_LFS\\_AHM\\_2013.7z](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/1978984/6037334/Evaluation_report_LFS_AHM_2013.7z) [last accessed November 2017]

<sup>6</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, Official Journal L 183 , 29/06/1989 P. 0001 - 0008 , 1989. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31989L0391:EN:HTML> [last accessed November 2017]

<sup>7</sup> EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Directive 89/391 - The OSH Framework Directive, website [undated b]. Available at <http://osha.europa.eu/en/legislation/directives/the-osh-framework-directive/1> [last accessed November 2017]

- Carry out safety and health RAs at the workplaces in the company and provide documentation of the results. This includes the obligations of implementing preventive and protective measures based on the results of the RA, in accordance with the general principles of prevention as laid down in Art.6 of the Framework Directive;
- Inform the workers about safety and health risks as well as about adequate measures of protection and prevention (Art. 10);
- Provide appropriate safety and health training measures and ensure that each worker receives adequate training in accordance with Art.12, which states that training must take place on recruitment, in the event of a transfer or a change of job, in the event of the introduction of new work equipment or a change in equipment, in the event of the introduction of any new technology. This must be repeated whenever necessary;
- Consult workers and their representatives and allow them to participate in the decision making process concerning safety and health at work; and
- Take care of measures of emergency response (incl. evacuation procedures, fire-fighting and first aid, Art. 8).

All EU Member States have therefore to transpose the legal obligations of providing OSH RA. The Framework Directive does not establish a framework for OSH RA and gives flexibility to Member States as regards to the size of undertakings in Article 9, the nature of their activities, the nature and extent of the risks.

As OSH Directives contain minimum requirements meaning that Member States are allowed to adopt more stringent measures, in practice, national measures undertaken in the area of OSH RA vary significantly, leading to different practices across the EU. Furthermore, as a detailed ex-post evaluation of the EU acquis demonstrated, carrying out RA is inherently challenging, particularly for SMEs which may lack the resources or the know-how to do so effectively<sup>8</sup>. SMEs represent almost 99.8% of all non-financial enterprises in the EU and only 69% of them declare that they perform regular occupational safety and health RA (compared with 96% for larger enterprises)<sup>9</sup>. EU-OSHA's European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) is an extensive survey looking at how safety and health risks are managed in European workplaces. ESENER 2 indicates that<sup>10</sup>:

- 78% of businesses surveyed across the EU-28 undertook regular risk assessments,
- larger companies are more likely to undertake RAs,
- there are wide variations between Member States (94% in Slovenia and Italy and only 37% in Luxembourg undertook an OSH RA), and
- there are also large differences on who performed the RA (76% were performed by internal staff in Denmark whereas only 7% of internal staff carried out RA in Slovenia, with external consultants playing a significant role in this area).

Figure 1 below shows that the main reasons given for not carrying out regular RA are that the risks and hazards are already known (83% of establishments) and that there are perceived to be no major problems (80%). Interestingly, small enterprises report less frequently than larger companies that the procedure is too burdensome: 22%

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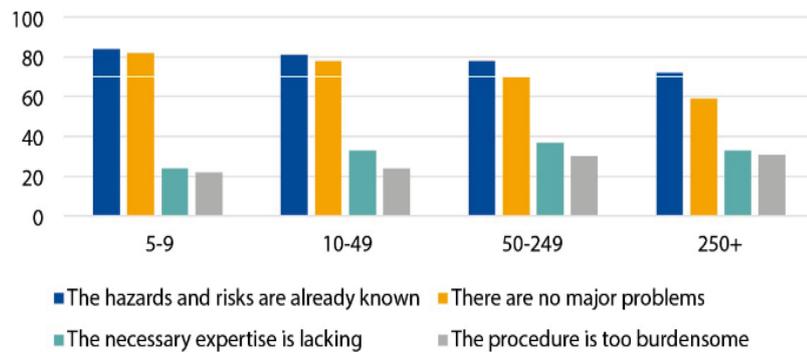
<sup>8</sup> European Commission Staff Working Document, (2017). *Ex-post evaluation of the European Union occupational safety and health Directives (REFIT evaluation)*. SWD(2017) 10 final.

<sup>9</sup> Reply of the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) to the public consultation on the new EU occupational safety and health policy framework, 26/08/13

<sup>10</sup> [https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ESENER2-Overview\\_report.pdf](https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ESENER2-Overview_report.pdf) [last accessed November 2017]

among those employing five to nine workers compared with 31% among those employing more than 250 people.

Figure 1. Reasons why workplace risk assessment are not carried out regularly, by establishment size



Base: establishments in the EU-28 that do not carry out risk assessments regularly.

Source: ESENER 2 survey, EU-OSHA, <https://oiraproject.eu/en/facts-and-figures-esener> [last accessed November 2017]

WBTs can support SMEs in carrying out regular and high quality risk assessments, which raise awareness of the need of identifying and managing risks, as well as effectively contributing to increase the number of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) which perform risk assessment. Therefore, it would be important that Member States support, promote and expand the free use of WBTs for RA.

To assist Member States, EU-OSHA has created the OiRA tool, a web-based platform that enables the creation of sectoral risk assessment tools in any language in an easy and standardised way. OiRA is based on the Dutch risk assessment instrument RI&E. It consists of the OiRA tool generator (where developers can create sectoral tools) and the OiRA sectoral tools, which are accessible through an interactive website. The OiRA tool generator is provided free of charge to sectoral social partners at EU and national levels, and to EU and national authorities. The generated OiRA sectoral tools are then made available for SMEs to use and carry out RAs. They are free to download and can be easily accessed by clicking on the relevant link<sup>11</sup>. In total, 123 OiRA tools have been developed since 2011, 25 new tools are under development and 62,813 RAs have been carried out by 16 Member States in 61 sectors<sup>12</sup>.

OiRA tools have been published for 15 countries (BE, BG, CY, CZ, EL, ES, FI, FR, IS, LT, LV, MT, NL, PT and SI) in 63 different sectors (as of end of September 2017). In addition to the OiRA tools, a number of national tools has also been developed. Among the Member States participating in the PR five Member States have made use of OiRA tools so far (BE, BG, FI, PT and SI) and four Member States have developed their own WBTs: Estonia (Töökik), Finland (Riski-Arvi), Sweden (Checklists) and Ireland (BeSMART). Norway is also in the process of developing its own tool, which is expected to be launched in 2018. Where Member States have developed their own tools, this is either because they pre-date OiRA, or because of a desire to be able to tailor approaches more closely to national legislation and other requirements (e.g. with regard to the design and presentation of such tools).

<sup>11</sup> See <https://oiraproject.eu/en> for a general link to the available OiRA tools. [last accessed November 2017]

<sup>12</sup> [https://oiraproject.eu/en/promotional-resources-search?field\\_promotional\\_material\\_type%5B0%5D=287](https://oiraproject.eu/en/promotional-resources-search?field_promotional_material_type%5B0%5D=287) [last accessed November 2017]



## 2 Overview of the host country policy/ practice: The Irish approach to OSH risk assessment

As a result of the economic and financial crisis, Ireland was obliged to reduce costs and administrative burdens for businesses and the Irish HSA was requested to achieve savings of EUR 60 million. This led the HSA to develop a new WBT for OSH RA, the Business Electronic Safety Management and Risk Assessment Tool (BeSMART), to help businesses reduce the administrative burden of legislative compliance. Even though SMEs constitute over 99% of all Irish businesses<sup>13</sup> - with a total number of 160,000 SMEs in 2016 - this sector as a whole had never been specifically targeted in the past. The use of a WBT was therefore considered an efficient way of reaching the widest possible number of SMEs, using the limited resources available within the HSA. Currently, BeSMART covers nine sectors, namely retail, hospitality, manufacturing, private healthcare, childcare, food service, beautician services, agri-business and construction and there are plans to expand this to other sectors.

BeSMART is an interactive tool, designed to allow SMEs to comply with the legal requirement to carry out RA by guiding them step by step through a process of producing and recording OSH RAs. The tool is free of charge to the user and has four objectives:

- to improve health and safety;
- to save users money;
- to reduce paperwork for users; and
- to allow users to comply with health and safety law.

BeSMART is a confidential service and contains many educational and instructional features with further links for those keen to learn more. Crucially, BeSMART also contains self-prompting features to monitor, review and when necessary expand the risk assessment.

The development costs for BeSMART were around EUR 30,000 and annual running costs for BeSMART's software development and maintenance are currently in the region of EUR 10,000. Five members of staff at HSA are currently engaged in the running of the tool. According to the HSA, the total savings for Irish businesses are estimated to be EUR 31-45 million. In 2016 alone, BeSMART registered over 8,000 new users, produced 140,000 risk assessments, and 7,000 OSH statements, received over 62,000 website visits and saved Irish businesses an estimated EUR 11 million.

Key success factors of the BeSMART tool include:

- **The large outreach of SMEs and MSEs and interaction with users.** Since its launch in 2011, it has been highly effective, reaching and interacting with a quarter of all Irish SMEs, representing over 43,000 businesses.
- **Obtaining and responding to feedback from MSEs in relation to content, accessibility and confidentiality.** At the design phase, the HSA investigated the potential of WBTs and its appeal through focus groups with MSEs. The focus groups demonstrated an interest and willingness from MSEs provided that the tool would be free to use, readily accessible when firms wanted it (i.e. online) and confidential. Confidentiality has been particularly important because the tool was to be run by the labour inspectorate. It was deemed essential, therefore, that firms trusted that their data would not be accessible to HSA and would not be used to target them for inspections. Responding to the feedback from users, BeSMART remained anonymous and free of charge.

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<sup>13</sup> SBA Fact Sheet Ireland, 2016, available at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/2016-SBA-Fact-Sheet-Ireland.html> [last accessed November 2017]

- **Developing, monitoring and reviewing the content through extensive quality control, updating the content and adding more tailored tools.** BeSMART is beginning to extend into OSH management and has already produced a health and safety plan template for the construction sector. BeSMART also contains self-prompting features to monitor, review and when necessary expand the risk assessment.
- **Promotional activities, in particular through working with the insurance sector, the labour inspectorate and other key stakeholders and participating in third party events.** Such activities include pro bono half or full day presentations of BeSMART to employer and employee groups nationwide. Any approach by potential users will be positively responded to with the offer of a free presentation and demonstration at a venue of their choosing. The remaining labour inspectors are also expected to raise awareness of BeSMART during their daily work activities. In 2016, the total number of promotional events undertaken by the BeSMART team was 56, representing just over one every week.
- **BeSMART is part of training and educational programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Ireland.**

At present, the impact of BeSMART on the quality of RAs and OSH statements – and indeed on OSH indicators has not been evaluated, although it is considered that by enabling and supporting the carrying out of RA among SMEs, OSH standards are likely to be improved.

### 3 National approaches to the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment

From the PR it emerged that there is no "best" or "one size fits all" approach and that it is important to contextualise the tools. The choice between using an existing OiRA tool or developing its own national WBTs depends crucially on the national context and needs to be tailored to meet the national needs.

Table 1 provides an overview of all the national WBTs (OiRA or national tools) and their main characteristics.

Table 1. National approaches to the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment

Country	WBTs for OSH risk assessment (OiRA or national tool)	Main features of the tools
Belgium	Use of OiRA tools. The first Belgian OiRA was developed in the hairdressing sector in 2014.	Sector-specific and free of charge. Currently, five Belgian OiRA tools are available online in the hairdressing, cleaning, woodworking, building and HORECA sectors. Four new OiRA tools are under development: two in bakeries, and the green sector and two in the live performance sector. The tool is not yet part of any training or educational curriculum in the country.
Bulgaria	Use of OiRA tools since 2011.	Sector-specific and free of charge. 33 risk assessment tools currently under development. The tool is not yet part of any training or educational curriculum in the country.
Estonia	Own WBT (Tööbik) developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with the National Labour Inspectorate in 2014.	Free of charge but not sector-specific and not yet part of any training or educational curriculum in the country. Furthermore, the tool is not yet recognised by all social partners and sectoral bodies.
Finland	Own WBT ("Riski-Arvi") launched in 1997. In addition to Riski-Arvi, there are several other tools and methods available and applicable to most workplaces. This increases the choice of risk assessment method for workplaces.	Riski Arvi is neither free of charge nor sector specific, having the same content to all workplaces and leaving it up to the employer to make the decision of the risks that are relevant and present at the workplace. Covers five OSH areas. The fee for a single workplace is EUR 200 per year, which includes five user accounts. The tool is not yet part of any training or educational curriculum in the country.
Ireland	Own WBT (BeSMART)	Sector-specific and free of charge. BeSMART is also included in the curricula of all major health and safety related educational programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Norway	New WBT to be launched in 2018 with three initial industries (hairdressing, cleaning, transport).	The tool will be easy to use (mobile application) and free. After an evaluation the tool may be expanded in 2019 to cover additional industries. Social partners are actively involved in the development of the tool.
Portugal	Use of OiRA tools. The first Portuguese OiRA tool became available online for the hairdressing sector in 2013.	Sector-specific and free of charge. The tool is not yet part of any compulsory training for employers.
Slovenia	Use of OiRA tools	Sector-specific and free of charge. So far 17 tools for the following professions have been developed: office work, hairdressing, road transport, joinery workshops, cleaning business, construction, vulcanisation, metalworking, chefs, car service, painter/plasterer, butchers, bakers, electricians, roofers, parquetry and generic tools. The tool is already part of a compulsory training for employers.
Sweden	Own WBT ("Checklists")	Free of charge and sector-specific, developed for more than 60 sectors, easy to use, effective dissemination through social partners and the Swedish Work Environment Authority. The tool is not yet part of any training or educational curriculum in the country.

Since the OiRA tools were analysed in Section 1.2, below we provide further information on a few examples of national WBTs developed for OSH RA, as well as Belgium which recently switched from its own (non-WBT) to OiRA.

The **Swedish checklists** were developed in the 1980s within a research project aiming at supporting MSEs in improving their OSH conditions. They were originally printed and sold, but were subsequently made available for free download online. They are also included in a tool – Regelbanken - where it is possible to make one's own checklist through combining a selected set of ready-made questions from existing checklists. In this way, the checklists can be adapted to each workplace. If a risk is identified, the company is asked to fill in: 1) whether the risk is severe, 2) what they will do to address it, 3) who is responsible for it. The number of downloads is comparable to that of BeSMART. Social partners have been involved in both the development and dissemination of the Swedish checklists.

The **Estonian** web-based interactive tool **Tööbik** for OSH RA was developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with the Labour Inspectorate in 2014. At that time, Estonia had the possibility to join the OiRA community and to start working with OiRA tools, similar to two other Baltic countries - Latvia and Lithuania. Nevertheless, it was a political decision to develop its own (national) web-based interactive tool that was supposed to be innovative and to address all the demands of Estonian employers. In particular, the Estonian authorities wanted to include personal data on employees and establishments by default, which was not possible with OiRA. Moreover, the Ministry of Social Affairs wanted to obtain statistics from the RA in order to have a profile for each workplace and employee and information about occupational risks. These were the main reasons leading Estonia to develop its own WBT. Nevertheless, it

has now been acknowledged that Töobik tool could be developed further, including introducing a sector-based approach. In that respect Estonia can learn a lot from BeSMART and other WBTs.

**Finland** launched the **Riski-Arvi tool** in 1997 initially in printed format. A few years later, the tool was published on the Internet in pdf-format free of charge and in the early 2000s, the first software version of the tool was developed. The Riski-Arvi tool provides hazard checklists to help the employers conduct comprehensive risk assessments. The checklists consist of five categories: physical hazards, chemical and biological hazards, accident hazards, physical strain and psychosocial stress. Unlike BeSMART, Riski-Arvi is independent from the OSH authorities and gets its funding from accident insurance payments paid by employers through the Finnish Work Environment Fund. Riski-Arvi is currently available in Finnish but Swedish and English versions will be available later this year. The fee for a single workplace is EUR 200 per year, which includes five user accounts. In Riski-Arvi, workplaces are asked to write a short description of each identified hazard. This is because it is important to analyse how and where the hazards are present at each workplace. In addition, risk estimation is required to analyse severity and likelihood of anticipated consequences. This helps employers to identify the most critical hazards and to prioritise scarce resources. These features are aligned with the fact that the employer is responsible of safety and health at work and they must know what the risks are. In 2016, approximately 30,000 workplace inspections were made. Risk assessment was inspected in 13,823 workplaces, and in 3,823 (28%) cases employer was requested to improve it. In these cases, risk assessment had not been done or it had been outdated or insufficient.

**Belgium** is an interesting example of policy change. The country opted initially for developing its own, non-WBT for OSH RA (the SOBANE strategy of risk prevention) with the help of the European Social Fund (ESF) in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, this had several disadvantages and it did not manage to be disseminated to SMEs. Thus, due to lack of budget and staff, the Ministry of Labour decided to become part of the OiRA community by developing Belgian OiRA WBTs. The first Belgian OiRA was developed in the hairdressing sector in 2014. The main challenge remains the promotion of these OiRA tools in collaboration with the social partners and the low take-up by SMEs. OiRA are still new tools and in the absence of evaluation, its impact and effectiveness cannot be estimated.

## 4 Benefits and drawbacks of WBTs

A number of benefits but also shortcomings of WBTs were identified and discussed at the PR. The benefits include mainly their potential in increasing compliance with OSH legislation, their cost-reducing role, their high quality and adjustability as well as their pedagogical role in increasing OSH risk awareness. The drawbacks include that WBTs cannot ensure compliance with regulation, they might be costly to update and difficult to assess and they also raise issues of confidentiality and data protection.

### Benefits of WBTs

- WBTs can assist SMEs in fulfilling their legal obligations and secure compliance with RA
- If properly designed, they can produce an action plan to address risks that were identified after the RA is carried out and thus ensure compliance with OSH and risk control
- WBTs can reduce administrative burdens and costs for SMEs and public authorities
- The use of web-based support can be monitored and statistics can be collected on the number of users, compliance with regulation, hazards identified and actions taken
- WBTs are sector-specific and thus can deal effectively with SMEs heterogeneity and the different needs and hazards facing different sectors
- The checklist approach ensures that risks are not missed and in general the standardised tool ensures a minimum/standardised level of quality of the RA
- WBTs can be used as training tools and become part of educational curricula/ training programmes to increase occupational risk awareness (pedagogical role)
- WBTs can encourage some action on risk management and control, which is more effective than doing nothing.

### Shortcomings of WBTs

- WBTs can support but not ensure compliance with regulation
- If not designed to produce an action plan, WBTs cannot support employers in the management of the risks identified
- WBTs can be costly to develop and to update in line with technological progress, change in regulation, user feedback etc.
- Concerns over data protection and lack of trust from companies that their information will not be used to inform an inspection regime.
- Difficult to assess the impact of the tool on the quality of RAs and control measures, lack of data and evidence, including on the impact on key OSH indicators

WBTs can assist SMEs in fulfilling their legal obligations, and support compliance with the requirement to carry out RA. To this end a certain level of recognition of WBTs in the OSH strategic or legal framework and/or endorsement from Labour Inspectorates could be helpful. Similarly, in the OSH Communication (COM(2017) 12 final), the Commission calls on Member States to fully embed the use of web-based risk-assessment tools in their national legal systems. WBTs are currently not embedded in European or national legislations and there is no indication that this would change in the near future and was considered not of most importance by most participants at the PR.

The Slovenian authorities have announced the intention of making a reference to their WBTs in their new Health and Safety strategy, however the strategy has not yet been agreed. In the feedback from the PR all participants agreed that Member States should support and promote the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment. Based on an ad hoc survey distributed by the host country expert at the PR event, 47% of participants stated that WBTs should not be embedded into national legislation but it should be left up to Member States and MSEs to choose which tool to use; whereas 53% of participants acknowledged the need to provide legal standing to WBTs by recognising them and embedding them into the national legislation as a method of compliance without however making their use compulsory. Reference to their availability (rather than a requirement to use them) could therefore be included in legislation or policy strategies.

WBTs can reduce administrative burdens and costs for SMEs and public authorities since they are quickly and easily accessible on the web, they are easy to use and standardised and can navigate the user through the process, there is no need for printing and storing paper documents, they can save costs by reducing recourse to external consultants for RA. They can potentially reduce fines and costs associated with accidents or work-related illnesses which may result from poor health and safety risk management. There are however some costs attached to WBTs, including costs for development and maintenance costs (for content and functionalities) to keep the tool up to date with technological and legislative changes, as well as taking into account user feedback. The update of WBTs (and in some cases the possible transition to new platforms) is likely to be costly. As such, Member States need to reflect already at the development stage on the target group as well as the cross-departmental use of the tool and data.

Unlike paper-based tools, it is possible to monitor the use of a WBT and also to get feedback on its usefulness and functionality. The statistics collected through WBTs can provide useful anonymised data to monitor steps towards OSH compliance. Nevertheless, this can work as a double-edged sword as companies are particularly concerned about data protection and confidentiality and reluctant to trust WBTs in the fear of disclosure of their inputs and data to Labour Inspectorates.

Finally, for employers WBTs can have an educational role (when training modules are embedded in the tool) and act as awareness-raising instruments on OSH risks. For intermediaries and policy-makers, the added value of WBTs can be strengthened if used in the context of a campaign or as part of vocational and educational training (VET) towards vocational qualifications.

The potential benefits of WBTs exceed the shortcomings, but as every tool, WBTs are limited in their functionality and cannot reach beyond their original mandate and purpose. For example, if they lack a legal standing or by design they do not provide action plans after the RA or they cannot be updated, their use and impact will be limited.

## 5 Challenges and success factors to widespread use of WBTs

Participant countries agreed that the biggest challenge at a national level remains raising awareness of, and overcoming some remaining resistance against WBTs. The main identified reasons for this resistance comprise the absence of knowledge about the legal requirement to perform RA, a perceived lack of need for it, the lack of trust from users, including concerns over data protection and confidentiality. Additionally, resistance from private OSH providers on reduced business opportunities and concerns over a diminished role of Labour Inspectorates also play a role.

Solutions put forward to overcome challenges and success factors were:

- Raise awareness among companies about the legal requirement to perform RA and the need to comply with OSH legislation. The high fines don't suffice, as they per se do not make SMEs understand the importance of OSH risk assessment and risk prevention.
- To validate the role of WBTs for OSH RA through: a) official recognition and the provision of a legal standing for WBTs, b) awareness raising campaigns, c) training and d) demonstrating a business case. Currently WBTs are not embedded in European (apart from the OSH Communication (COM(2017) 12 final) or national legislations and thus lack a legal basis that might limit their use.
- In order to demonstrate a business case, systematic and robust evaluation of WBTs is required. WBTs have the potential to reduce administrative burdens and costs for SMEs and public authorities (e.g. by reducing recourse to external consultants for RA, potentially reducing fines cost and costs associated with accidents/ill health). However, the PR demonstrated the dearth of evidence and data on the effectiveness and impact of these tools, beyond the fact that they are well received where used and increase the number of businesses completing RAs. Thus, a systematic and robust evaluation of WBTs is required. This evaluation will need to carefully elaborate the concept of 'success' for WBTs. For example, reaching SMEs and raising awareness was considered as evidence of effectiveness, however, only personal experiences exist on the quality of RAs and control measures implemented with the use of such tools.
- To reach a larger number of users it is paramount to ensure buy-in from the start and involve all stakeholders (social partners, insurance companies, labour inspectors, SMEs, etc.) throughout the process, from the development to the implementation of the tool.
- Additionally, WBTs need to be part of a holistic approach to risk management and integrated into a wider policy strategy. BeSMART is a good example in that respect because it is indeed part of a bigger approach. To ensure that risk assessment will lead to risk control, the WBTs should provide concrete action plans and solutions if hazards are identified to assist SMEs in tackling them and complying with the law.
- Another success factor in order to increase take-up is to make the WBTs simple, flexible, free of charge and of high quality (including controlling for all risks - psycho-social and organisational risks which are often neglected); make the tool sector-specific and recognise the heterogeneity of SMEs in the flexibility and adaptability of the tool.
- Most of the participants express concerns over data confidentiality and data protection, it is therefore crucial to ensure confidentiality of the information uploaded on the WBTs to gain trust from companies.
- To meet the future challenges of technological and legislative changes the tools will need to be regularly updated in their content and functionality. Therefore,

Member States will need to look into the best strategies to keep the tools relevant for users. The update of WBTs and/or the transition to new platforms is likely to be costly. As such, Member States will need to reflect already at development stage on the end-users as well as cross-departmental use of the tool and data.

- Finally, the last success factor is to link WBTs to education and training. For example, pedagogical elements could be embedded in the tools, including instructive videos and good practice examples on control measures. WBTs could also be usefully integrated in vocational and educational training (VET) strategies as well as on the induction training of new employees in all companies.

## **6 Conclusions and recommendations**

The Peer Review on 'Use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment' (Dublin, 2-3 October 2017) demonstrated the utility of WBTs to encourage compliance with the requirement for RA, particularly among SMEs. It also highlighted the need for Member States to undertake concrete measures and actions to promote the use of WBTs for OSH risk assessment and to overcome any remaining concerns or barriers regarding their use.

In its OSH Communication (COM(2017) 12 final), the Commission has set the following priorities with regards to risk assessment and WBTs, calling on Member States to:

- a) fully embed the use of web-based risk-assessment tools in their national legal systems;
- b) recognise OiRA and similar tools as compliance with risk assessment obligation;
- c) reach out to SMEs, raise awareness and promote the use of OiRA and similar national web-tools; and

The PR highlighted that there appears to be little wish for including the use of web-based tools in national legislation, though reference to their existence and utility can be made in strategic documents and in many countries, such tools are being developed and actively promoted and are considered to be helpful particularly by SMEs. The Irish and other national examples also showed that such tools can be developed cost effectively, but do need to be maintained and updated on a regular basis.

In the case of OiRA, the WBT of EU OSHA that is developed with EU financial and technical support and active cooperation of national partners and sectoral social partners, the Commission Communication calls for the following targets to be reached by 2018, focusing on priority sectors: 150 published OiRA tools, and 100,000 risk assessments carried out with the tools. The most effective frameworks and strategies can act as inspiration in this area. This is true for the Irish tool and other national examples provided at the Peer Review, whether or not these are based on OiRA.

A particularly important factor is the strong involvement of social partners. As the PR demonstrated, the recognition of the WBT by the social partners and their active engagement from the early beginning and throughout the whole process of the design, implementation and dissemination of the tool has been proven to be crucial for the validity and widespread use of the tool by both SMEs and workers.

It is important to note that while WBTs can contribute towards compliance with the requirement to carry out risk assessment and indeed in a number of countries encourages more SMEs to use such tools to support compliance, the PR demonstrated that little is currently known about the impact of the use of such tools on the quality of RA statements being prepared and indeed the quality and suitability of control measures implemented as a result. Furthermore, no research is currently available on the impact of the use of such tools on OSH indicators (number of accidents at work and incidence of occupational illnesses). Participants at the PR supported the idea of further work in this field.

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