

Review of Dutch Experience - DRAFT

1. Introduction and Key Issues

The RI&E tools named after the Dutch word for risk assessment (RA) tools ('Risico-Inventarisatie- en Evaluatie-instrumenten') were among the first online risk assessment tools to be developed in Europe and their success has inspired EU-OSHA to use the Dutch model as a basis for developing OiRA. This study¹ has been based on a combination of desk research to examine websites and documentation and interviews with several key players involved in developing and implementing the Dutch tool. This study takes into account the feedback received from the Dutch stakeholders. The key contacts in this context were:

- **MKB-Nederland**, the employers' organisation for small and medium-sized enterprises;
- **FNV**, the Dutch Trade Union Confederation;
- **The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment**;
- **TNO**, the research organisation² which runs the secretariat of the RI&E Steunpunt (RA Support Point);
- **The RI&E Steunpunt**, run by the social partners in conjunction, with the Government as an observer.

The respective roles of the above stakeholders are further explained in section 4, but in short the RI&E initiative was initially launched jointly by MKB-Nederland and Government. Once the generic tool was finalised and it was decided to fine-tune the tool at sector level, the unions came on board. The Government facilitated the process by providing consultation, cooperation and funding to this tripartite effort. The RI&E Support Point was set up in order to promote the development of RA tools, increase the number of sector specific tools, approve the tools and stimulate their regular updating.

A number of questions were defined in the terms of reference for this study:

Key Questions – Dutch Experience

- Why was the **Dutch version of the tool** developed? What sort of assessment of needs was undertaken to justify its development? How was the tool developed? How was the content obtained and validated?
- Which were the **partners** involved and what was their role? What are the possible issues with the involvement of the different partners and how were they addressed?
- What were the **costs for the development** and how long did it take? What were the support structures/mechanisms used? What were the preparatory (e.g. training) and the actions taken to promote the tool?
- What are the **operation, maintenance and support services costs** involved? How are they currently covered and how/by whom is the long-term viability of the tool secured?

¹ This study has been carried by the Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES) on the behalf of EU-OSHA. The text has been corrected on the basis of comments provided by MKB Nederland, the RI&E Steunpunt, TNO, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Trade Union Confederation FNV. Further comments from the Dutch stakeholders are likely to be made available for the draft final report.

² TNO is an independent research organisation whose expertise and research make an important contribution to the competitiveness of companies and organisations, to the economy and to the quality of society as a whole. TNO stands for innovation with purpose - they develop knowledge not for its own sake but for practical application, to create new products that make life more pleasant and valuable and help companies innovate. In short, they find creative answers to the questions posed by society. The mission of TNO Work & Employment is to develop knowledge that contributes to 'keeping more people longer at work, in good health and with high productivity'. TNO has more than 4,400 employees and is partly financed by government (1/3 of income).

- What is the **effectiveness and the overall success of the tool**? What is the scale of use of the tool, what evidence of benefits to users exists and what is the scale of the impacts?
- What were the **factors that affected the success of the tool** in the Netherlands?

2. Rationale and Development of the RI&E Tool

In this section the following key questions are examined:

- Why was the Dutch version of the tool developed? What sort of assessment of needs was undertaken to justify its development?
- How was the tool developed? How was the content obtained and validated?
- What were the costs for the development and how long did it take?

2.1 Background and Legislative Framework

In order to have an adequate understanding of the context in which digital risk assessment (RA) was developed in the Netherlands, it is necessary to elaborate a little bit on the Dutch situation.

A main characteristic of Dutch OSH policy is the so-called ‘polder model’, according to which Government and social partners share responsibility for OSH, yet have different roles.

In this context, the role of the Government is primarily to:

- develop legislation/regulation including levels of OSH protection;
- provide relevant information to social partners, facilitate and support their actions;
- enforce legislation (e.g. through the labour inspectorate).

The role of social partners is primarily to contribute to the development of means and tools to facilitate the implementation of OSH-related legislation and policy.

At the same time, Government and social partners are involved in sustaining each other in their respective roles by means of consultation and cooperation on several levels. The ‘polder model’ applies to Dutch industrial relations as a whole.

The Dutch workforce consists of ± 7.5 million people. The number of companies is approximately 800.000 of which some 786.000 are small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In the Netherlands, like elsewhere in Europe, companies with up to 250 employees are regarded as SMEs. A majority of these enterprises, i.e. 76%, have between 2 and 10 employees. The average SME in the Netherlands consists of 7 employees.

The legislation stipulating the use of risk assessment is the **Dutch Working Conditions Act** (WCA, Arbeidsomstandighedenwet), according to which all employers must record the risks faced by their employees in their health and safety policy, as well as develop a plan for how they intend to reduce these risks. Since 1994, when the EU Framework Directive to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers³ was transposed into Dutch law, it has been obligatory for all employers who have paid labour working for more than 40 hours a week to carry out a Risk Inventory and Evaluation (RI&E).

2.2 Early Risk Assessment Tool

The initial Dutch risk assessment questionnaire consisted of paper-based lists of generic health and safety related questions to be answered by the employer: (Have any accidents ever

³ 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

occurred in the company? What could go wrong that might cause failure to machinery? What is the risk of this happening? How could this risk be limited?). Subsequently, a plan had to be developed in consultation with the employees in which the business owner outlined how and when he intended to deal with the identified risks. However, this approach presented a number of problems, especially to the smaller businesses. In their perception risk assessment meant:

- **loss of time** (in comparison to bigger companies, small companies felt they spent too much time on filling in the RA questionnaire and making an action plan);
- **money** (less time spent on their core business meant loss of money, moreover at the time the RA and action plan had to be checked by a certified, preventive OSH service – which costs money, and furthermore alienated the employer from the process);
- **paperwork** (administrative burden);
- **complexity** (making an RA required a lot of expertise).

A different approach was therefore needed, especially for the smaller SMEs, which should lessen their administrative burden by being less time consuming and more practical and business/sector oriented. It should also be easily understood, so that the employer or company could fill in the questionnaire themselves which would in turn lower the costs.

Faced with this challenge, Government and the employers organisation for SMEs, MKB-Nederland, decided to embark upon a joint venture to reduce the burden on small companies.

The result was the so-called ‘**MKB Arbo Activiteitenprogramma 2003-2005**’ (‘SME occupational safety and health programme’), a 3-year programme developed in close cooperation between MKB-Nederland and the Government. Its main aim was to develop a series of measures and tools to boost compliance with the WCA and reduce the complications experienced by small businesses. One of the identified needs of SMEs was the development of a digital risk assessment tool.

2.3 Launch of the First Digital Risk Assessment Tool

Having formulated the conditions the new tool had to meet, MKB-Nederland and the Government went into cooperation with the research organisation TNO for its development. The main requirements of the tool were:

- designed specifically for companies with less than 25 employees;
- digital and modular (only the relevant parts that apply to a specific company should be used);
- simplicity / do it yourself option;
- less paperwork and less cost.

This **first digital risk assessment tool, a generic tool**, was launched in spring 2004. The tool allowed businesses to download the RI&E questionnaire and fill it in offline. The choice of a generic approach served two purposes. First, it allowed sectors without any RA tools to have access to a generic tool. Secondly, it could be used as a basis for sectors to develop their own sector-specific RI&E instrument, providing them with the structure, content and technique.

In the development phase, research was carried out to determine how SMEs think and act when it comes to risk assessment. The draft tool was presented to the Labour Inspectorate (part of Government) for their comments. Two different OSH services were asked to test it

on some **of their SME clients**. These tests proved that the tool was adequate, yet they testified that there was a need for transformation of the generic tool to a more sector-specific approach, focussed on the more important risks and possible solutions in specific sectors.

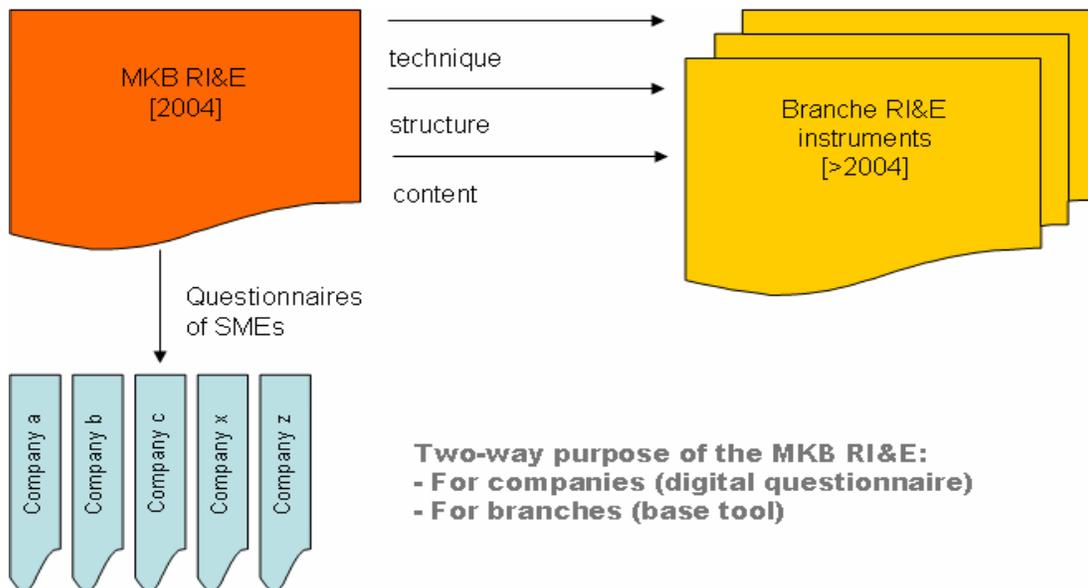
As part of the ‘MKB Arbo Activiteitenprogramma’ a website (www.mkbarbo.nl) was also developed which gave access to the generic tool. The current website (www.rie.nl) was developed in 2003 by the Arbo Platform Nederland (OSH Platform of the Netherlands)⁴.

2.4 Sector-specific RI&E Tools

It did not take long before the need emerged for a fine-tuning of the original tool. On the basis of their positive experience with the generic tool, several sectors voiced the need for the instrument to be further developed to take account of their specific business practices and argued that the tool would be used more if it were tailored to specific sectors. To facilitate this process the TNO was again commissioned to help provide technical support to sector organisations that wanted to develop their own sector-specific, digital RI&E tool. Acknowledging the problems faced by the smaller businesses, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment decided to co-fund the development such sector-specific versions and in 2004 **tailor-made RA tools for 20 different sectors** were launched.

The sectors were chosen in conjunction with MKB-Nederland and according to the needs and willingness of the different sectors to participate. In a series of focus groups with SMEs and OSH experts hired by the sector organisations, the most important risks to be addressed by SMEs in each of the different sectors were identified. Subsequently, the focus groups also assessed and approved the test version of the sector tools once they had been developed.

The following figure illustrates the relationship between the initial MKB RI&E tool and the subsequent 20 sector-related RI&E instruments:



2.5 RI&E Support Functions and Implementation Strategies

In order to support the implementation of the generic and sector specific tools, two different strategies were developed. Initially, support and helpdesk provision for the generic tool (and for some of the sectoral tools of its member organisations) was located at MKB-Nederland.

⁴ A platform of social partners and government aimed at promoting OSH

However, once the 20 sector-specific tools had been developed, a further step was made to take the unions on board. In this tripartite setting – in line with the ‘polder model’ – more than 80 additional tools were designed on the basis of the generic one. All of these sector tools focus at least on the most important risks of specific sectors and are developed with involvement of TNO and the OSH preventive services.

In 2007, after the OSH platform closed down, a new bipartite support function was erected in the form of the current **‘Steunpunt RI&E-Instrumenten’ (RA Support Point)** which is responsible for the management of the RI&E system. The main partners in the Support Point are the key employers and employees organisations, with the Ministry of Social Affairs acting as an observer. However, the TNO still takes care of the day-to-day running of the support function (the functionalities of the RI&E Support Point are described below in section 3.1).

In order to make facilitate the usage of the new digital RI&E instruments, occasional **training courses for employees** on how to use the sector-based instruments were organised with support from the Ministry and the sector organisations were expected to promote the new RA-tools to their members. This, however, did not occur automatically. The partners in the Arbo Platform and, later on, in the RI&E Steunpunt therefore decided to develop a series of **implementation strategies** to make it easier for the different sectors to ‘adopt’ the RI&E instruments. This led to a change of approach whereby the Support Point would invest in promoting and stimulating sectors to intensify the implementation of the tools. The individual stakeholders (MKB-Nederland, FNV, other trade unions, the Ministry, TNO) have also made a lot of promotion on their respective websites and in their contacts with businesses in an effort to engage the sectors. Another element contributing to engaging the sectors, is the fact that RA tools are only valid for 3 years. In order to maintain the approval of the RI&E Support Point of their tools, sectors are required to update them regularly. Failure to do so will lead to increased costs, since they will need to hire a preventive OSH service to carry out the approval, whereas that is not necessary with a valid RA tool.

2.6 Further Developments

As already stated above, the need for developing tailor-made sector-specific tools was strongly promoted both by social partners and Government and during the period between 2004 and 2010, a large number of sectors were added. Apart from active promotion, the positive experiences of other sectors who had already developed a RI&E tool probably also had a role to play. Currently, 172 different sectors have developed their own risk assessment tool which are directly (or indirectly) available on the RI&E website. Not all of them are digital yet but so far there are 111 approved digital RI&E tools. During the same time period (2004/2005), the digital system was redeveloped with an on-line and an off-line version of the tool reflecting to the ICT-developments in SMEs.

Over the years, a number of further developments have taken place including regular **updates of the various sector-specific tools**. One important development in this period was a **change of the Dutch WCA legislation**, negotiated by the social partners’ through their Collective Labour Agreement, to the effect that small companies with less than 25 employees are no longer required to engage the services of an OSH service to have their RA reviewed and approved (the exemption took effect in July 2005). Instead, they can comply with the OSH legislation by completing a questionnaire that has been approved by the employers and workers organisations in the relevant sector. This has provided a relatively easy and inexpensive way for the smallest companies of fulfilling the risk assessment requirement. It is also a strong incentive to participate in the RA exercise.

Another significant step was the development in 2010 of the **‘next generation RI&E tools’**. The most important element here was the use of the OiRA technology and source code and

the **migration of the RI&E data to the Agency's tool**, as well as some import of OiRA data, with the overall objective of letting the Agency and other EU countries benefit from the developments and improvements that had already taken place on the Dutch RA instruments.

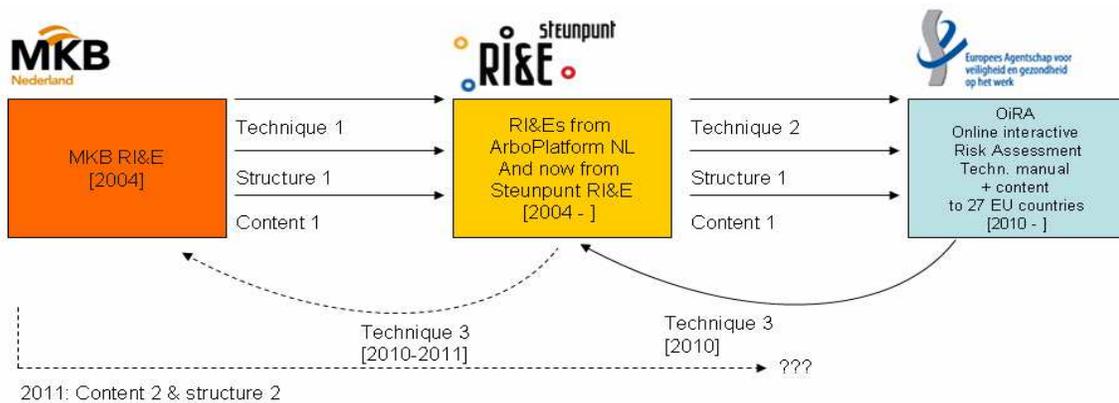
Important steps in developments in the Netherlands were and now are:

- Use of OiRA technology and migration of the Dutch tools into this system;
- Change of the WCA legislation;
- Communication and Implementation Plan 2011-2012 of the RI&E Support Point;
- Communication in 2011 of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the RI&E Support Point to promote the legislative changes.

The development of the generic RA tool took around one year. Further fine-tuning in connection with the subsequent 20 sector-specific tools took another year. The full process to get from a generic paper-based version of RA to a situation where more than 100 sectors are covered by an online tailor-made RA tool has taken some 6 years at least. Given that other countries will now have the possibility to benefit from the technical developments created by the Dutch and by EU-OSHA, the process is likely to be significantly faster elsewhere.

It has not been possible to get an estimate of the total **expenditure on the Dutch RA tool** as so many different stakeholders have contributed to the development. However, the funding provided by government for the development of the initial MKB RI&E tool, under the SME Activity Programme 2003-2005, was about €80,000 and the co-funding for the development of the 20 sector instruments was approximately €150,000.

In order to understand the way in which the different phases of the RI&E instruments relate to each other, the following figure will provide a clearer overview:



Initiator: MKB-Nederland

Done by:
TNO
technique ThinkWorks)

Initiator:
ArboPlatform NL
And now Steunpunt RI&E

Done by:
TNO + techniek Humatix en
Amaze

Initiator:
EU-OSHA

Done by:
Syslab.com

Technical platform:
Plone

From MKB RI&E to OiRA

3. Key Features of the Dutch RA Tools

In this sub-section the current status of the online RA system and its day-to-day operation are examined.

- What overall services are available in the RI&E system?
- How does the operation and maintenance of the tool work?
- What are the costs involved in operating and maintaining the RI&E tools? How are they currently covered?

The overall purpose of the Dutch digital RA tools as they stand today **is to ensure that SMEs primarily, but micro enterprises in particular, comply with the legal obligations to execute a risk assessment and to reduce the administrative and financial burden** on them in doing so. Other companies may use the tool, but they do not get the ‘bonuses’ that small companies get. Furthermore the aim is to improve their level of health and safety; to improve general awareness about the existence of the RA tools and finally to stimulate the development by the social partners of new sector-specific RA tools.

3.1 Key RI&E Services

After having developed the sector-specific approach in 2004, a number of additional services have been added on to the RI&E system and it currently consists of the following key elements:

- **172 different tailor-made digital RA tools**, 120 of which are approved and the endorsement for 24 RA tools is pending (March 2011);
- **A dedicated website** (www.rie.nl) giving access to all the RI&E tools;
- **The RI&E Support Point** hosting the system/providing general support;
- **A Help Desk** for sector developers and end-users;
- **A system of social partner acknowledgement** of RA tools.

All the 172 sector-specific RA tools are available online on the website (www.rie.nl), either via a direct link or if the specific tool is not digital there is at least the contact details of the relevant sector organisation from which the paper-based risk assessment tool can be obtained.

The sector-specific digital RI&E instruments are easy to use and the business owner only needs to answer questions that are really relevant to his/her particular field. The intention was that you should be able to complete the RA including the action plan, within 2 hours. Sometimes it is less, sometimes it takes more time, depending on the content of the tool. Sector-specific RA tools also make it easier to provide detailed solutions for business, as standard solutions to resolve a potential risk are available in the RA tool (or additional information is available, for instance through hyperlinks).

The **RI&E website** (www.rie.nl) is organised in a relatively straightforward manner, providing an alphabetic overview of the different tools by sector with a specific page per each sector. On the page there is a link to the tool and relevant sector organisation as well as information on the level of acknowledgement of the tool by the social partners (see Section 2.4). Furthermore, there is specific advice on how to create a risk assessment geared to the two main target groups: employers and employees in companies and sectoral business organisations. The process of carrying out an RA is divided into four different phases in order to make it more manageable for those involved. The steps differ depending on the target group:

- For **companies**: (i) identification; (ii) evaluation; (iii) action plan; and (iv) update;
- For **sector organisations**: (i) development; (ii) acknowledgement; (iii) implementation; and (iv) maintenance.

Finally, the website provides links to frequently asked questions and access to an online Help Desk run by the RI&E Support Point (TNO) which provides technical assistance to developers and users.

The **RI&E Support Point** has a key role in the implementation of the RA system and is responsible for the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the tools. This includes the hosting and development of relevant software, administration of the Help Desk and other technical and administrative support to potential users. In addition, it provides information to companies and trade organisations and is responsible for promotion and marketing of the tools. The Support Point is manned by two people on a part-time basis (a project manager and a consultant), with two others as back-up. Whereas TNO operates as a daily executive secretariat for the Support Point, it is overseen by a steering group of representatives from the employers' and workers' organisations with the Ministry of Social Affairs as an observer. This ensures that the interests of all stakeholders are taken into account and its role also includes the consultation of the social partners on various issues in connection with the operation of the system.

The Support Point receives funding for its various activities from the Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment amounting to some €300,000 per year. The Ministry has also agreed to invest €2 million for the 5-year period 2010-2014 to further develop the RI&E tools, among others to carry out a dedicated communication and implementation campaign. The money has been earmarked as follows:

- RI&E Support Point activities: €200,000 (2010); €300,000 (per year in 2011-2014);
- Survey of RI&E users: €200,000 (2010);
- Development of next generation of RI&E tools: €100,000 (2010-2011);
- Communication and implementation campaign: €300,000 (2011-2012).

This pledge from the Ministry ensures the continued development and maintenance of the Dutch RA system for the next 5-year period.

4. Role of RI&E Partners

It has been essential to ensure the collaboration of a number of relevant partners in the RI&E development process. This section will attempt to answer the following questions in relation to the involvement of stakeholders:

- Who were the involved partners and what was their role? Were there any issues with the involvement of different partners and how were these addressed?
- What were the support structures/mechanisms used?

As discussed previously, a number of different partners have been involved in the development of the Dutch RA tools since the beginning - especially the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the small employers' organisation MKB-Nederland, who have been actively participating throughout. Later on in the process, the Dutch Trade Union Confederation, FNV, other workers' organisations and relevant social partners at sector level have also taken on an important role

The approach that has been used throughout in the Dutch case is one whereby the **social partners in the respective sectors have been initiators** in the development of the RI&E tool. This is seen to be a very important element, as it has helped to ensure the commitment

and involvement of these social partners as they have taken ownership of the tools. It has furthermore resulted in more sector-oriented, more practical and overall better tools. In other words they have based themselves on a bottom-up rather than a top-down model – which has not been product driven, but company and business driven.

In spite of the process having been driven from the bottom up, the Ministry has played a significant role as a facilitator in pushing developments forward which has been crucial for the process. In this role the **Ministry's main tasks** have been:

- to initiate discussions with MKB-Nederland due to the fact that RA compliance proved particularly hard for SMEs, especially for small/micro companies, with the idea not to dictate to SMEs what to do, but try to reach goals based upon consensus about their needs. The SME OSH programme (MKB Arbo Aktiviteitenprogramme) reflected this.
- to provide financial means - many sectors benefited from this and it really helped to push developments forward.
- to agree to do things differently – it has been very important that the Ministry saw the benefits, and was one of the initiators, of the new approach which was crucial in helping SMEs with RA and lowering their costs.
- to be involved on an ongoing basis in the RI&E Support Point as an observer and sponsor to increase the number of tools, to contribute to their maintenance, and to promote RA more widely.

The development process in the Netherlands has also shown that **the initiative to develop a sector-specific RA tool can come from several sources**, either from an employers' organisation directly or out of a deliberation between an employers' organisation and trade unions, for instance as an agreement in the Collective Labour Agreement.

- The employers' organisation can ask for an account to use the content management system and develop their RA tool (possibly with support of an OSH service). If the employers' organisation thinks it is important that the RA tool is recognized, it should be reviewed by an assessor on behalf of the trade unions.
- The employers' organisation can also involve the unions in the development of an RA tool from the start. The best way to do this has been described in a manual for employers' organisations, established by social partners and available on the RI&E website.
- An finished tool can be made available on the RI&E website. If it has been endorsed a special endorsement logo will appear next to it (see more details in section 4.1 below).

Active promotion has been made throughout about the availability of a content management system that the social partners could use to create their own RA tool, both on the website and by circulating newsletters, preparing guides (how to develop, how to implement RA tools etc.). The fact of providing a permanent helpdesk and publishing frequently asked questions on the website has also assisted in promoting to social partners the opportunities for creating a digital RA tool.

4.1 Endorsement of RI&E Tool

The social partners now have a key role in the process of **'acknowledging' or endorsing a sector-specific RA tool**. There are two ways in which an RA tool can be acknowledged in the Netherlands:

- The tool can be included in the social partners' Collective Labour Agreement (CAO in Dutch) – this approval forms part of the RA rules in the Dutch legislation (WCA); or

- The tool can receive more informal approval by social partners at sectoral level. There are also plans to incorporate this type of acknowledgement as part of the WCA.

Both types of acknowledgement are registered by the Support Point next to the relevant tool on the RI&E website, either by a **caov** or a **RI&E** mark. For small companies with less than 25 employees this acknowledgement replaces the need for an OSH expert to approve their risk assessment, making it easy and convenient to use for these small business. There is a requirement to review and update all RA tools every three years and if this does not happen, the mark of acknowledgement will be removed and the advantage of not having to employ an OSH expert will be lost (which can easily cost €1,500). This acts as an incentive for both sectoral organisations and individual companies to renew their risk assessments.

For the purpose of endorsement a statement will be sent to the employers' organisation, which has to be signed by both the employers representative and an unions representative. After sending it to the Support Point RA the logo becomes available on the website www.rie.nl.

An RA tool can be endorsed for a maximum of 3 years. Both risks and their solutions are likely to evolve over time and to ensure that the RA tools maintain a 'state of the art' status, they need regularly updating. An administrative system has been put in place for that purpose. Three months before the endorsement ends the partners will receive a letter informing them that the RA tool has to be updated. If they do not manage to do so within the timeframe, the endorsement logo will be removed.

4.2 Promotion of RI&E

It was understood early on in the process that the simple existence of the online risk assessment tools would not guarantee that SMEs would actually use and implement the tools.

One of the key roles of the RI&E Support Point has therefore also been to raise awareness about the instruments among potential users and to communicate with businesses and their organisations in order to stimulate the use of the tools in businesses. An important element in this process has been **the active involvement of the social partner organisations**, especially those at sector level, in promoting the RA tools to their members. However, the collaboration of other partners has also been sought such as insurance companies, accountancy firms and other advisers to small businesses. One challenge in this context has been the difficulty for social partners in reaching the smallest companies with between 1-9 employees as very few of the employees in these companies are members of a trade union.

Another important element in promoting the RA tools has been the contribution made by the last **EU-OSHA European campaign 2008-2009**. The main theme of this two-year campaign was risk assessment and it aimed to convey the message that RA is not necessarily that complicated or bureaucratic and that once in place it is likely to either prevent or control the occurrence of risks. Another message of the campaign was to promote an integrated management approach to RA taking account of the different steps in risk assessment, which is the same approach as the Dutch system uses. This European campaign apparently contributed considerably to the general awareness of the public about the advantages of risk assessment and the existence of the RI&E tools.

Given the importance attached to promoting the RA tools in order to get companies to implement them, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has committed some €250,000 a year in **communication and implementation activities** over the next 2 years (2011-2012). The communication campaign will consist of a number of workshops with SMEs and road shows, as well as the production of brochures and articles to reach the relevant target audience. There will also be a specific promotional campaign to raise

awareness about the existence of the tools and the legal obligation to perform a risk assessment.

5. Impact of the RI&E Tool

The following questions in terms of the success that the Dutch RA tool has had among micro enterprises and SMEs and its impact to date are examined:

- What is the scale of use of the tool and what evidence of benefits to users exists? What is the tool's overall effectiveness and success are there any evidence of impacts?
- What were the factors/parameters that affected the success of the tool in the Netherlands?

The fact that at present a total of 172 different sectors have decided to develop a custom-made risk assessment tool to be posted on the RI&E website is a sign of the scheme's success in itself although some of these are not digital yet. However, there are a number of other **indicators of the results** of the Dutch instruments, including the following elements:

- Since the creation of the www.rie.nl website, there have been a total of **1.6 million visits to the website**. This is an impressive number given that the Netherlands is a relatively small country with approximately 800,000⁵ companies in total.
- Another important indicator of the tool's success is the number of **downloads of the online tools**. Since January 2005 when the first sector-specific RI&E tools had been developed, there have been 250,000 downloads. Around 5,000 copies are downloaded each month in average.
- Besides, in a **2006 evaluation⁶ of the SME OSH programme** in which the initial 20 sector-specific tools were developed, it was states among others that:
 - the RA tools developed in the SME OSH Programme are well known by sector organisations;
 - the tools are used by these organisations; and
 - they are positive about the RA tools.

Factors that have been instrumental in this success include the exemption of RA rules for companies with less than 25 employees included in Dutch legislation (WCA) that means they no longer need to use an OSH expert to approve their risk assessment.

In order to obtain information on the usage of and satisfaction with the RA tools, the Support Point organised a survey among RI&E users in 2010. This also contained the results from the TNO's two-yearly WEA survey (Werkgevers Enquête Arbeid) from 2008/2009 of the number of SMEs that have prepared a risk assessment and an action plan. A total of 5,387 companies responded to this questionnaire. As the results below indicate, there is still a very large group of the smallest companies that have not yet developed a RA in spite of the existence of the online facilities to do so:

⁵ Figure provided by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

⁶ Carried out by the institute 'Orbis, advice and research' in late 2006

Table 1: Percentage of Dutch SMEs that have undertaken Risk Assessments

Company size	% that have prepared a RA	% of these that have an Action Plan	% with full RA incl. Action Plan*	% who have had the RA acknowledged
2-9 employees	39%	67%	26%	58%
10-25 employees	74%	83%	61%	74%
26-49 employees	68%	78%	53%	79%
50-99 employees	90%	89%	80%	86%
> 100 employees	100%	86%	86%	90%

* Note: 26% corresponds to 67% of the 39% that have prepared an RA

As can be seen, according to the WEA survey, the proportion of responding SMEs that have undertaken a full risk assessment, including an action plan, lies in the range 26% to 86%. If it is assumed that the group of 5,387 respondents is representative of the total population of 800,000 companies in the Netherlands, a straight average of 60% would suggest that some 480,000 of all Dutch firms have completed a risk assessment. Relating this directly to the RA tool is difficult. However, even if only half the 250,000 downloads so far led to RAs being completed, this would still mean that around a quarter of the completed RA could be attributed to the tool. Further research would be needed to verify this estimate and to establish the extent of additionality, i.e. the proportion of SMEs that would only have undertaken an RA because of the availability of the digital RA tool.

6. Dutch Experience – Critical Success Factors

During our research and discussions with the Dutch stakeholders, a number of factors have emerged as having contributed to the success of the RI&E system:

- **Accessibility and user friendliness** – the tool is easy to use, even for very small companies, and is readily accessible. The fact that the contents has been validated by the social partners and is tailored to different sectors is also essential.
- The **role of social partners** has been critical to the development of the RA tool in ensuring the design of the system is relevant to target groups and in helping to disseminate it to potential users. Placing the main responsibility within the companies making them the owners of their problems has also been crucial in order to engage them.
- **Support and Promotion** - the existence of a dedicated support service and help desk has contributed to the RI&E's success, as has the emphasis on active promotion and awareness-raising to emphasize the advantages for SMEs of using the RA tool. The development of a large-scale communication and implementation strategy to reach companies that do not yet comply with RA legislation is also expected to contribute significantly.
- **Regularly updating the RA tools** – this has helped ensure the tool remains relevant and has been essential for SMEs to be able to tackle severe risks and thus improve the working conditions. In this context the organisation of feedback out of the sectors to improve the RA tool has helped.
- The **support made available by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment** - the cooperation, promotion and funding provided by the Ministry has been essential in ensuring the development and roll out of the tools. Also important is the exemption from certain requirements under Dutch OSH legislation if firms use the RA tool.

The **success of the RI&E model is very much a product of the Dutch socio-economic context**, in which industrial relations are characterised by a very close tripartite collaboration

between Government and the social partners. This is not necessarily the case in all countries. Also, the Dutch RA tool is the result of a **process which has taken some 8 years of gradual development** from a generic tool initially, through to pilot projects in a few sectors, in order eventually to reach the remarkable array of sectors that are represented in the RI&E instrument today.

In **attempting to transfer the Dutch experience to other countries**, it has to be kept in mind that the current situation in the Netherlands is the outcome of a great deal of discussions and negotiation between stakeholders, promotion to developers and users in the different sectors, and ongoing adaptations and improvements of the tool. It can therefore not be expected that their practice is instantly transferable to other Member States.

Moreover, the European legislation (Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989) requiring companies to conduct risk assessments date back to 1989, so **most Member States have developed their own risk assessment tools**, although these will vary significantly in depth, width and nature. The OiRA model might complement these quite easily or it might represent a completely different direction. Depending on their current position, different countries will therefore have quite different attitudes towards the possibility of adopting the EU-OSHA tool.

A key issue is the **extent to which the RI&E tool has had a positive impact** and been used by SMEs in the Netherlands to undertake RAs. As suggested in Section 5, some further research will be needed to determine the extent to which this is so. In theory, it should be possible to calculate the cost per SME for development and use of an online tool such as RI&E (as indicated earlier, more details on costs are needed). This would make it possible to establish a benchmark for other countries which could be a helpful guide in planning the development of similar tools and the funding required to do this.

Last but not least, and as mentioned above, compared with the Dutch RA model, it should be possible to speed up the development and roll out of OiRA in other countries given that there are many lessons to be learnt from Dutch experience.

Critical Success Factors

Division of responsibility:

- Prime responsibility to stay with companies and social partners. Government should provide incentives but should not try to take responsibility

Incentives to developers and users:

- Reducing legal obligations and costs act as a powerful incentive to companies
- Tools should be user-friendly and easy to use
- Sectors should have the opportunity to give feedback, improve tools and validate them. Tools should be adapted to the specific sectors (look and feel of sector). Tools should preferably be validated by the sectoral social partners to improve credibility

Promotion and communication:

- Awareness should be maximised through effective promotion/communication
- Information for social partners, developers & businesses should be readily accessible. Social partners should be involved in developing and dissemination of the tool

Availability of ongoing support:

- A support function for users and developers is necessary including a technical help desk. Availability of training in using the tool is important, at least initially
- Tools should be updated and validated regularly

Support by national authorities:

- Funding by the Ministry has clearly been vital for the development of RI&E
- Exemption from certain legal requirements for firms using RI&E has also been important