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Title: European Collaboration as a
Pathway for Societal Impact and
Academic Excellence

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1. Opening – The Dual Mandate in the National and European Context

Good morning, colleagues and friends and welcome to the sixth PEROSH conference. My name is Steffen Bohni Nielsen. Chairman of PEROSH and also the Director General of the Danish National Research Centre for the Working Environment – NFA.

22 years ago directors general from European OSH research institutes recognized the need and potential within strengthening European collaboration across the OSH field. To realize this potential PEROSH was born.

Two years ago, when PEROSH celebrated its 20th anniversary the founding fathers and mothers were invited. I humbly acknowledge their foresight. In the current geopolitical climate European collaboration and institutionalization is as important as it ever was.

Those of us leading or working within national OSH research institutes share a unique profile in our respective countries.

Every PEROSH member institute holds a particular position in its national occupational safety and health ecosystem — whether as part of a ministry, a public university, an independent scientific organisation, or embedded within an accident insurance system.

Despite these differences in governance and structure, we share the same core mandate: To produce and procure applied research that makes work safer, healthier, and more sustainable.

Today, our PEROSH family has 15 member institutes from 14 countries, representing more than 2,500 OSH experts — a knowledge resource unmatched in Europe and beyond.

But with that mandate comes a dual challenge. Applied research sounds straight forward, but it is not:

Research implies we must adhere to high scientific standards. We must deliver academic excellence — delivering credible, high-quality, peer-reviewed research that stands at the forefront of our field.

Applied research implies that the research must be used. It must be informative, and perhaps even transformative, at the workplace and at the policy level. We must deliver societal impact — ensuring that our evidence is not only published, but translated into policies, regulations, policy implementation, and workplace practices that protect millions of workers.

These are not competing, or even mutually exclusive goals. They are interconnected, and *international collaboration* is the bridge that allows us to achieve both at the same time.

PEROSH exists to make that bridge stronger, more resilient, and more productive for all its members.

2. Why Collaboration is Central to Excellence and Impact

Putting aside geopolitical arguments, let's start with a simple question: why do we collaborate across borders at all?

In academic terms, collaboration has clear benefits. Bibliometric studies show that internationally co-authored publications are more widely cited, more visible, and often more innovative. In OSH, cross-border projects bring in perspectives from engineering, medicine, psychology, economics and many other disciplines — making our science richer and more relevant.

But the case for collaboration is equally strong when it comes to impact. Policy-makers at both the European and national level are more likely to act on evidence that:

- Reflects diverse workplace contexts.
- Is robust across multiple jurisdictions.
- Carries the credibility of multiple respected institutions.

Think about it: if a PEROSH study on reducing occupational cancer risks includes data from 10 countries, it is much harder for a policymaker in Brussels to dismiss it as “just one country’s view.”

Correspondingly, national policy makers will equally pay attention to research findings consistent across multiple national contexts.

Excellence without impact risks becoming irrelevant. Impact without excellence risks being ignored.

The art — and the necessity — is to achieve both together. This is the unique role of PEROSH’s member institutions in their national OSH ecosystems and it is a role, which can be strengthened through European collaboration

3. The PEROSH Strategy 2025–2029 – Five Strands in Action

PEROSH’s new strategy is more than a plan on paper. It’s a blueprint for how we can use European collaboration to strengthen both our science and our influence. Let me therefore present its goals and underlying rationale.

Strand 1 – Competency Development

We all know that the strength of our network depends on the skills of our people. That's why the first strand is about developing competencies that matter. Through joint programme we can design and offer competency development opportunities beyond the capabilities of our individual institutions. Some of the planned actions include:

- **EU Funding Training:** Picture a young researcher at one of our institutes, passionate about psychosocial risks at work, but unsure how to navigate Horizon Europe calls. PEROSH training demystifies the process, provides actionable guidelines and helps turning ambition into funded projects.
- **Emerging Topic Workshops:** From AI in OSH to gig economy safety challenges. The world of work is changing. By pooling resources, we keep our researchers ahead of the curve — the recent workshop on AI in OSH in Rome is testament to these ambitions.
- **Science-in-Policy Training:** Imagine a brilliant intervention study... that never leaves the academic journal. This training ensures that doesn't happen — teaching our people how to identify dissemination opportunities, and translate findings into language and formats policymakers will act on.
- **Dissemination Impact Pathway Workshops:** Helping teams design dissemination as integral to the research

process from day one, not as an afterthought. At the institutional level we can learn what channels are effective in reaching diverse audiences.

Strand 2 – Joint Research

Joint research is the heartbeat of our network. Over the years many joint research projects have been completed. Our planned actions include:

- **Shared Priorities:** By aligning our research agendas, we avoid duplication and focus on the big questions — whether it's nanomaterials, ageing workforces, or climate change and OSH.
- **Shared Databases:** A feasibility study will explore how we might pool data across borders. For example, imagine the power of a Europe-wide OSH exposure database for influencing policy.
- **Early Career Development:** Our joint projects are an ideal training ground — with mentorship, exchanges, and international team experience built in.

Strand 3 – Advocacy

Science only shapes policy when it's heard at the right time, in the right way by the right people. Whilst the stakeholders at national level remain the sole responsibility of the member institutes, a number of transnational institutions affect policy and regulation at European level, and eventually at national level, i.e. through EU directives transposed to national legislation. Therefore, it makes sense to forge stronger relationships to key

stakeholders at European and international level and work systematically with opportunities to inform policy-making.

- **Stakeholder Relations:** We want to maintain and strengthen relationships with DG EMPL, EU-OSHA, the ILO, WHO, and other key bodies.
- **Policy Watch:** We want to create a structured process for scanning emerging legislative issues — allowing PEROSH to provide timely, evidence-based input before decisions are made.

Strand 4 – Dissemination

Scientific publishing is expanding exponentially. It is estimated that about 5-7 million new articles gets published every year. Since 1996, an estimated 64 million articles have been published.

Making sense of these massive amounts of knowledge, even in a minor field such as OSH, this is a challenge. We are at risk that important scientific knowledge gets ignored, simply because no one has an overview.

The ugly truth is; research has no societal impact if it sits on a shelf.

Within the PEROSH scientific community, much context pertinent research gets published each year. The challenge is to make it accessible across Europe. Therefore, we have planned the following actions:

- **Technological Solutions:** We will explore if it is feasible to develop accessible databases, interactive tools, and visual summaries of the cumulative body of research produced by our members.
- **Internal Awareness Campaigns:** We must ensure that every researcher in our institutes knows what PEROSH is doing and there is an opportunity to tap into a network of kindred spirits and experts. We must find ways to strengthen researchers' connections and enhance collaboration.
- It begins with awareness of what PEROSH is and the expertise it holds. Until recently, we did not have a full overview of the domains in which our members do research. We now have this knowledge and we must leverage it by making knowledge about past and current projects accessible, and by bringing our experts together.

Strand 5 – Infrastructure

Science is expensive. Particularly, in the STEM field significant investments in physical and technological infrastructure is needed.

Compared to universities PEROSH institutes are relatively small and therefore we must think of clever ways to invest and utilize such infrastructure. We consider our collective infrastructure is a hidden treasure.

If we collaborate potential synergies can be realized. Two actions will be set in motion:

- **Mapping Capabilities:** We will catalogue labs, facilities, and areas of expertise across the network.
- **Sharing Models:** Next, we'll explore if it is feasible to make these resources available to partners across borders — for example, enabling a noise exposure study in one country to benefit from specialist lab capacity in another.

4. Looking Ahead – What Could 2029 Look Like?

If we fully embrace this strategy, imagine where we could be by 2029:

- A PEROSH portfolio with high priority research projects backed by all 15 institutes.
- Shared datasets enabling meta-analyses that define global OSH standards.
- Early career researchers fluent in both the language of science and the language of policy.
- PEROSH as the first point of contact for EU institutions seeking OSH evidence.
- Tangible policy changes in multiple countries, driven by PEROSH research.

This is not wishful thinking — it is achievable if we commit to the European collaboration the strategy demands.

5. Call to Action and Closing

Colleagues, we have the people, the expertise, the infrastructure, and the plan.

Our challenge — and our opportunity — is to use them in a way that fulfils our dual mandate:

- To be academically excellent.
- To have real-world impact.

International, and particularly European, collaboration is how we do both. And PEROSH is the platform that makes it possible.

Let's commit to making that platform stronger, more active, and more ambitious than ever before.

Thank you.