

SOLID PHD COLLOQUIUM & SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE 2026

ASTANA & ALMATY (KAZAKHSTAN)

REPORT

This is the report of the SOLID PhD Colloquium & Social work conference that took place in Astana and Almaty from 28 April to 7 May 2026.



SOLID PhD Colloquium

SUNDAY, 26 APRIL & MONDAY, 27 APRIL 2026

The programme began with the arrival of the participants on Sunday, 26 April and Monday, 27 April 2026. All participants were accommodated at the Park Inn by Radisson Astana, where airport pickup services were arranged by the hotel.

Kazakhstan's capital city Astana greeted us with beautiful spring weather. With a population of around 1,6 million people, Astana is the second-largest in the country after Almaty. Our hotel – the Park Inn at Saryarka Avenue – was located close to Astana Central Park and the Right Embankment which allowed us to explore the green spots of the city.

TUESDAY, 28 APRIL 2026

The programme of the SOLID PhD Colloquium started on Tuesday, 28 April 2026, with an opening session from 9:00 to 9:15, during which participants were introduced to the programme and informed about their respective roles.



Photo: First day together in Astana

The first day of the SOLID PhD Colloquium was devoted to the presentation and discussion of the research projects. We started with a first round of discussions from 9:15 to 10:45, moderated by Ayagoz Aubakirova. Presentations were delivered by Zhuoming Zhao, Charos Abdugofurova, Gulaziya Issakhova, and Asel Tentigenova, while Yicheng Wei served as timekeeper and Shuo Li as note taker.

After a short coffee break, the second round of discussions took place from 11:00 to 12:30. The presenters for this session were Yicheng Wei, Shakhnoza Ganieva, Aidos Ibragim, and Asel Isaeva. Zhuoming Zhao moderated the discussion, Gulaziya Issakhova acted as timekeeper, and Asel Tentigenova was responsible for taking notes.

Following the lunch break, the third round of discussions was held from 13:30 to 15:00, with presentations by Shuo Li, Ayagoz Aubakirova, and Feruz Majidov. Zhuoming again moderated the session, while Charos Abdugofurova served as timekeeper and Shakhnoza Ganieva as note taker. A coffee break was organised during the afternoon, after which participants attended a workshop on "Understanding Quantitative Studies" by Katarzyna Kowalczyk from 15:00 to 17:00, with Shuo Li taking notes.

The day concluded with dinner from 19:00 to 20:00, followed by a film evening. We watched one episode of the documentary "Taking back what's ours!" which was made by the Drug Reporter, a project of the Rights Reporter Foundation from Hungary. The documentary focuses on community organizations of people using drugs in the Netherlands, Belgium and France.

WEDNESDAY, 29 APRIL 2026

On Wednesday, 29 April 2026, the SOLID Team Kazakhstan organized a public round table at for L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, dedicated to the development of social work in the penitentiary system and the health care sector in Kazakhstan.



Photo: L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Astana

The roundtable was opened by Nazgul Gazizollayevna, Vice Rector for Finance and Investments at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Alua Nadirkulova, Ambassador of the Kazakhstan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Monika Iwersen, German Ambassador to Kazakhstan, delivered welcoming remarks.

The roundtable featured many enlightening presentations from SOLID researchers from China, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, and was attended by more than 100 participants (50 in person and about 70 online). Participants stressed the importance of a human-centered approach for social work in the penitentiary system and the health care sector.



Photo: The SOLID team attending the Round Table at ENU in Astana

The roundtable was organized by Dinara Yessimova, scientific coordinator of the SOLID project in Kazakhstan. However, the event would not have been possible with the support of the whole Kazakh team. It was great to see the progress that has been made in the study of social work development in China and Central Asia. Particularly interesting were the presentations by Nurgul Musaeva (Bishkek State University) on social work in the penitentiary system in Kyrgyzstan and by Jiang Du (Shanghai Mental Health Center) on

drug treatment in China and Nodira Latipova (National University of Uzbekistan Named after Mirzo Ulugbek) on social work development in Uzbekistan.

With Dalida Mukasheva, Ayazhan Kumatova (both L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University) and Ulla Pape (Technische Hochschule Nürnberg), three SOLID post-doc researchers contributed to the Round Table. The event also allowed the SOLID team to connect with the teaching staff of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and discuss the development of the professional profiles for social workers in the penitentiary system and in the health care sector which are currently developed in cooperation with the National Alliance of Professional Social Workers in Kazakhstan.

After returning to the hotel and having lunch, participants attended film screening at the hotel. We watched the documentary "A Long Way Back" by the film maker Dmitriy Omelchenko which was made in the context of the international project "In the Shadow of the Gulags". The documentary is a story about the fates of people who found each other and believed in a possible salvation, not only in a metaphysical world, but here and now. The film will tell the biographies of several parishioners and the pastor of the Pentecostal Church in the city of Tomsk in Russia.

THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 2026

The programme continued on Thursday, 30 April 2026, with a workshop by Larissa Steimle (Technische Hochschule Nürnberg) on "Qualitative Research Methods." This topic proved to be particularly useful as many PhD researchers are using qualitative methods in the dissertation projects.

The workshop was followed by the Annual Meeting of the SOLID project in which participants from China, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan reported about their project activities and discussed the priorities for the organization of future activities in the SOLID project.

In the afternoon, Ulla Pape (Technische Hochschule Nürnberg) had the opportunity to join the delegation from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, led by prof. Hok Bun Ku of the Department of Applied Social Sciences Hong Kong Polytechnic University for visiting the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The delegation consisted of prof. Hok Bun Ku, dr. Sui Kan Yip, dr. Alpha LAM, dr. Cara Chen (all Hong Kong Polytechnic University), dr. Dinara Yessimova (L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University) and Ulla Pape (Technische Hochschule Nürnberg).

In the meeting with Juldyz Dosbergenqyzy Süleimenova, Minister of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the delegation emphasized the need for strengthening the professional training of social workers in Kazakhstan's education system. Ulla Pape

explained the background of the SOLID project and raised the topic of prevention services in the school system in Kazakhstan.



Photo: Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

FRIDAY, 1 MAY 2026 – SUNDAY, 3 MAY 2026

Friday, 1 May 2026, and Saturday, 2 May 2026, were designated as free days in Astana. Participants nevertheless gathered for lunch and dinner at the hotel. On Saturday, 2 May 2026, some participants departed for excursions in and around Astana, while others had



the opportunity to continue workshop discussions and collaborative work in small groups in the hotel lobby. Lunch and dinner were again organised at the hotel.

On Saturday, 2 May 2026, a group of participants joined an exchange meeting on publication plans within the SOLID project. On Sunday, 3 May 2026, participants had lunch and dinner at the hotel before transferring to Almaty.

Social Work Conference

MONDAY, 4 MAY 2026 – TUESDAY, 5 MAY 2026

On 4 to 5 May 2026, the SOLID team participated in the international conference “Social Work in Action. Interdisciplinary and Global-Informed Strategies for Bridging and Advancing Sustainable Development in Central Asia,” co-organized by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University Centre for Sustainable Development in Central Asia.



Photo: The SOLID team at the conference “Social Work in Action” at Al-Farabi University

The conference brought together scholars, practitioners, and representatives of governments and international organizations from Central Asia, Europe, and Asia to

discuss the development of social work, educational standards, and sustainable development in the regional context.

Organized jointly by Hong Kong Polytechnic University, International Association of Schools of Social Work, and Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, the event emphasized international cooperation, professional standards, and workforce training for social protection systems. The conference featured plenary and thematic sessions on social work transformation, mental health, digitalization, and sustainable development, while also highlighting research contributions from Kazakhstan and other countries of Central Asia. Key outcomes included new cooperation agreements, the development of an online platform for global social work education standards, and plans to strengthen academic partnerships and modernize specialist training in Central Asia.

The SOLID team actively contributed to the conference. In the first plenary, Nurgul Musaeva (Bishkek State University) gave a presentation on social work development in Kyrgyzstan, while Katarzyna Kowalczyk (Global Public Health Network) presented on “The Role of Social Workers in Preventing AI-Enabled Scams Among Vulnerable Populations” and Ulla Pape (Technische Hochschule Nürnberg) on “Beyond Grants: Work Integration Social Enterprises as Sustainable Strategy in Social Welfare.”



Photo: Networking at the “Social Work in Action” conference

On the second day of the conference, Asel Isaeva (Bishkek State University) gave a talk on “Penitentiary social work in Kyrgyzstan” and Asel Tentigenova (Bishkek State University) on “Organizing Palliative Care for People Living with HIV in Kyrgyzstan.” Ayagoz Aubakirova (L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and National Alliance of Social Workers of Kazakhstan) spoke about the “The Role of NGOs in Institutionalizing Social Work in Central Asia: Challenges for Regulation.”

The participation in the “Social Work in Action” conference provided the SOLID team with valuable opportunities to exchange knowledge, discuss current research developments, and gain new perspectives. The conference also promoted promote networking with researchers and professionals from different institutions in China and Central Asia, fostering future collaborations, academic partnerships, and interdisciplinary dialogue. It was particularly valuable to participate in an international conference with a majority of participants from Asia. This allowed the SOLID team to get a better understanding of social work development in China and the countries of Central Asia.

In addition, the “Social Work in Action” conference supported the professional development of the SOLID team members by strengthening communication skills, expanding international visibility, and creating opportunities for joint research and publication activities.



Photo: Group photo at the final day of the “Social Work in Action” conference

WEDNESDAY, 6 MAY 2026 – THURSDAY, 7 MAY 2026

On 6 to 7 May 2026, the SOLID team participated in an excursion that organized by Al-Farabi University to explore the mountains of Kazakhstan. The field trip provided a wonderful opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the country and its people. Furthermore, the SOLID team members had time to get into contact with the other conference participants.

The first day of the field trip included visits to Charyn Canyon and Kaindy Lake. The program began with a morning transfer followed by field research activities at the Valley of Castles in Charyn Canyon. After traveling to Saty Village, participants engaged in a community immersion activity and experienced local cuisine during lunch. In the afternoon, the group visited Kaindy Lake before returning to Saty Village for dinner, hotel check-in, and rest. Participation in the field research visits.



Photo: Visiting Charyn Canyon in South-Eastern Kazakhstan

On the second day of the field trip, the program included breakfast followed by a visit to Kolsai Lake, where participants explored the area and its natural surroundings. After returning to Saty Village for lunch, the journey continued with a visit to Black Canyon before returning to Almaty in the evening.



Photo: With the SOLID team at the beautiful Kolsai lake

FRIDAY, 8 MAY 2026

One Friday, 8 May 2026, it was time to say good-bye, and the SOLID team members returned home. Overall, the PhD colloquium and the participation in the “Social Work in Action” conference provided an inspiring and enriching experience, combining academic exchange with numerous new encounters and international perspectives. Researchers, practitioners, and representatives from different countries came together in Kazakhstan to discuss current challenges and innovative approaches in the field of social work and sustainable development.

The journey to Kazakhstan created a dynamic atmosphere for meaningful dialogue, interdisciplinary learning, and the exchange of ideas across cultures and professional backgrounds. In addition to the insightful presentations and discussions, the PhD colloquium, the round table at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and the conference at Al-Farabi University offered valuable opportunities for the SOLID team to establish new professional contacts, strengthen international networks, and explore possibilities for future collaboration. The combination of academic engagement, cultural experiences, and personal interactions made the visit both professionally rewarding and personally memorable.