



The 11th Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference 2025

*Promoting Research, Exchange, and Evidence Based Policy Making
in Central Asia*



10-11 October 2025

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Conference webpage:

<https://lifeinkyrgyzstan.org/conference/lik-conference-2025>

WELCOME

On behalf of the University of Central Asia (UCA), it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 11th Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan (LiK) Conference here in Bishkek. Now in its second decade, LiK is more than a conference: it is an international and regional community of academic researchers, students, development practitioners, policy makers and civil society leaders committed to understanding the lives and aspirations of people in Kyrgyzstan and across Central Asia.



This year's programme again spans a remarkable range – from livelihoods, labour and enterprise to climate change and environmental resilience; from health, food security and education to governance, public attitudes and migration. Some papers draw directly on the LiK Study; others bring complementary data and perspectives. All share a common purpose: to generate evidence that illuminates real lives and informs better policy.

We have more exciting news this year! Thanks to the support of our donors – the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) – we have been able to collect a new 2025 wave of data for the LiK Study. These new data will extend our uniquely valuable dataset and strengthens its longitudinal power, opening fresh possibilities for rigorous, policy-relevant research in the years ahead and giving us much to look forward to in the twelfth edition of this conference in 2026!

For UCA, LiK sits at the heart of our mission to produce research that leads to tangible impact in mountain societies. The conference exemplifies what we value: high-quality, transparent data; rigorous analysis; constructive debate; and the translation of findings into action. It also reflects the spirit of partnership that we want to define Central Asia's research ecosystem.

I would like to thank our organising team at UCA and our partners and supporters for their dedication and professionalism, as well as the many session chairs, discussants, translators and volunteers who make LiK possible. A special word of appreciation goes to Professor Tilman Brück, whose leadership in establishing (maintaining and furthering) the LiK Study has laid the foundations and provided the momentum for this enduring endeavour.

I hope you find the discussions over the coming days challenging but most of all that this year's LiK sparks new collaborations, sharpens our collective understanding, and helps us turn academic insight into real life impact.

Welcome to LiK 2025!

Professor Christopher J Gerry
Rector
University of Central Asia

Welcome to the Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference 2025!

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 11th Life in Kyrgyzstan (LiK) Conference here in Bishkek. The LiK Conference is the premier platform in Central Asia for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to review evidence, exchange ideas and strengthen collaborations around Central Asia. I am truly proud to see this initiative continue and expand, together with the University of Central Asia and our many partner organizations.



In a time of profound global and regional changes, high-quality microdata and evidence-based research are more important than ever. Data and evidence reveal how events and policies shape people's daily lives, their behavior and their well-being. These insights also form the foundation for designing effective policies, guiding scarce resources to where they can do the most good.

This year, I am especially excited to announce that the LiK Study team has finished collecting the 7th wave of the LiK Study panel data in June 2025. We now have detailed micro data tracking the lives of the same individuals and households in Kyrgyzstan since 2010 - a unique data infrastructure in the region!

Thanks to the generous support of the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, this wave of data places special focus on climate change, energy transition, the long-term effects of childcare, and the challenges of polarization. As with previous waves, the data will be released after a one-year embargo, and we look forward to keeping you informed as this process develops.

I wish us all an inspiring conference, full of stimulating discussions and new connections. I am confident that the Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference will continue for many years to come, bringing together an even wider community of scholars and partners.

I look forward to speaking with you at the LiK Conference!

Tilman Brück

Principal Investigator, Life in Kyrgyzstan Study

Professor, Humboldt-University of Berlin, Germany

Group Leader, Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops, Germany

Director, ISDC - International Security and Development Center, Germany

PLENARY SESSION 1. Keynote Speech

10 October 2023, 16:50 - 18:00 (Karkyra)

Dr. Kathleen Hermans

Senior Researcher at the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO)



Stay or Go? When Climate Change Reshapes Lives

The world is becoming ever more interconnected, yet people's lives are increasingly shaped by uncertainty, inequalities, scarce natural resources, and fragile livelihoods. Climate change adds to these pressures: for some, this means relocating in search of opportunities; for others, it means staying put—whether by choice or because they lack the necessary resources to leave. This lecture will review what we know about the links between environmental change, mobility, and immobility, drawing on insights from diverse case studies worldwide. It will highlight the plurality of responses—from temporary labor migration to voluntary immobility—and the importance of household resources, aspirations, and capabilities in shaping migration decisions. Against this background, the talk will discuss why Central Asia deserves more attention: its dependence on agriculture, high vulnerability to water scarcity, and strong reliance on migration to secure household income. It will argue that insights from other regions, combined with emerging local research, can help us better understand and prepare for the mobility challenges and opportunities the region faces.

Bio: Dr. Kathleen Hermans is a senior researcher at the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO) in Halle (Saale), Germany. Her work focuses on the interactions between climate change, land degradation, and human migration, with a particular interest in social-ecological systems in Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. From 2016 to 2022, she led the research group MigSoKo ("Human Migration and Global Environmental Change: A Vicious Cycle?") at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) in Leipzig, Germany, where she explored the reciprocal linkages between environmental change and migration, with case studies in Ethiopia. She earned her PhD in Land System Science from Wageningen University in the Netherlands and was a lead author of the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land, published in 2019. In addition to serving on the editorial boards of Sustainability Science and Regional Environmental Change, she is an active member of the Population-Environment Research Network (PERN). Dr. Hermans regularly convenes international conferences, workshops, and networking events focused on the migration–environment nexus, particularly in Central Asia and Germany.

PLENARY SESSION 2. Keynote Speech

11 October 2025, 10:50 - 12:00 (Karkyra)

Dr. Asel Doolotkeldieva

Research Fellow of the International Research Group on Authoritarianism at the University of Potsdam

Towards 'vernacular' Central Asian geopolitics: Russia-Kyrgyzstan/Kazakhstan entanglements after 2022



Three years after the full invasion of Ukraine, there seems to be continuity of Russian influence in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but this belies significant shifts under the surface in a rapidly evolving geopolitical context. Economic and financial entanglements with Russia in terms of trade, foreign investment, and rublisation have increased under the impact of sanctions and the war. But does this demonstrate that elite geopolitics is all that matters? Drawing on insights from critical geopolitics, the lecture discusses how and why we should look beyond an elite-centric view of geopolitics towards 'vernacular' geopolitics, i.e. to the geopolitical imaginaries of ordinary people. It argues that this is not just an ethical concern but a productive conceptual and analytical framework that helps better understand empirical processes currently underway. There are reasons why popular support for a close or distant relationship with Russia is important for geopolitical analysis in authoritarian contexts. Reconfiguration of labour migration, the emergence of a younger generation beginning to question historical legacies of Soviet rule, and the emergence of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as hubs of Russian parallel import are part of how entanglements with and imaginaries of Russia are changing among populations and businesses. As these important reconfigurations have been affecting different strata of society differently in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, popular support for association with Russia varied too. Higher inflation and devaluation of tenge - at least partly induced by the war and sanctions - are a source of societal discontent among the ordinary people in Kazakhstan while GDP growth and the new ecology of war seem to be benefiting a narrower group of elites. Kazakh and Kyrgyz elites are navigating the issue of association with Russia more carefully than before, but regime legitimacy remains an important element of how the relationship with Russia is conducted. The lecture concludes that popular imaginaries participate in the co-production of geopolitical power, pushing for a continuous association with Russia in Kyrgyzstan and for more distance from it in Kazakhstan.

Bio: Dr. Asel Doolotkeldieva is a Research Fellow of the International Research Group on Authoritarianism at the University of Potsdam (Germany). She studies populist mobilizations and revolutionary praxis in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian contexts in conversation

with discourses and practices of democracy, equality and social justice. Asel wrote extensively on regime transformations, contemporary popular uprisings, social protests and anti-neoliberal resistance with an empirical focus on Central Asia. Her work explores contentious politics across fields such as extractive industries, environmentalism, community resistance, and geopolitical encroachment of Russia and China. Her latest paper "Mining for Norms: International Extractivism, Chinese Business, and the Indeterminacy of Compliance in Kyrgyzstan (in Regulation & Governance with Till Mostowlansky) investigates Chinese business behavior against the background of uncertain regulatory framework, community resistance and opaque political system. Her current research focuses on the nexus of public opinion and elite legitimacy of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes in geopolitical relations with great powers.

LIFE IN KYRGYZSTAN STUDY



The Life in Kyrgyzstan (LiK) Study is a research-based, open access, multi-topic longitudinal survey of households and individuals in Kyrgyzstan. It tracks the same 3,000 households and 8,000 individuals over time in all seven Kyrgyz regions (oblasts) and the two cities of Bishkek and Osh. The data are representative nationally and at the regional level (East, West, North, South). The survey interviews all adult household members about household demographics, assets, expenditure, migration, employment, agricultural markets, shocks, social networks, subjective well-being, and many other topics. Some of these topics are addressed in each wave while other topics are only addressed in selected waves. The survey was first conducted in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2019, and 2025.

The LiK Study received funding from the Volkswagen Foundation for the first three waves (2010-2012) when it was hosted by the German Institute of Economic Research (DIW). In the period 2013-2015, Wave 4 was funded by DFID and IZA as a part of the Growth and Labour Market-Low Income Country (GLM-LIC) Programme. The consortium included the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) as the lead institution, UCA as the main Kyrgyz partner, and several research institutions from Asia, Europe and North America. Since then, the study has been hosted by the Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops (IGZ) for Waves 5 and 6 and has received funding from UN-FAO, IFPRI, DFID, IZA and, internally, from IGZ and UCA. Wave 7 was funded by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

The 'Life in Kyrgyzstan' survey data is publicly available. The data can be used by any interested party for non-for-profit research, policy analysis and teaching purposes. The data for 2010-2013, 2016 and 2019 can be obtained from the International Data Service Center (IDSC) of the Institute for Labor Economics (idsc.iza.org/lik) as well as survey questionnaires and interviewer manuals.

The LiK Study today is a global knowledge and research infrastructure, with panel dataset made available for public access. This has resulted in the wide use of the LiK Study for academic research. As of May 2025, over 40 scientific academic articles using the LiK data were published in international peer-reviewed journals such as *Agricultural Finance Review*, *American Political Science Review*, *Demography*, *Demographic Research*, *Economic Journal*, *Economics of Transition*, *Food Security*, *Journal of Comparative Economics*, *Journal of Development Studies*, *Problems of Post-Communism*, *Social Science & Medicine*, *World Bank Research Observer*, and *World Development*. The LiK data are used for research and teaching purposes in 35 countries by 178 academic, research and development institutions. The list of journal articles based on the LiK data is listed at the end of this brochure.

JOURNAL ARTICLES BASED ON THE *LIFE IN KYRGYZSTAN* STUDY

(Sorted by year and alphabetically)

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ORGANISERS OF THE CONFERENCE



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT
Institute of Public Policy and Administration

Institute of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Central Asia (IPPA UCA) was established in 2011 to strengthen public policy in Central Asia. It provides in-depth analysis on current and

emerging policy issues facing the region, and improves the analytical capacity of governments and civil society to use evidence in decision-making processes through professional development. The Institute has produced a series of peer-reviewed research papers on social and economic issues, public administration and public policy relating to Central Asia and Afghanistan. More information can be found at <https://www.ucentralasia.org/Research/ippa>.



IGZ – Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops carries out research supporting the sustainable production of vegetable and ornamental plants and the rational use of natural resources. It contributes to the success of horticulture in various

countries, understanding fundamentals of horticultural and plant science, sustainability in production and use of plants, healthy nutrition and wellbeing of the population. Its work is rated by acceptance and appreciation by professionals in practical horticulture and by the society, publications in high-ranking scientific journals and acquisition of competitive grants. More information can be found at <https://www.igzev.de>.



ISDC - International Security and Development Center is a non-profit academic institute. We conduct research to improve lives and livelihoods shaped by violent conflict,

fragility and humanitarian emergencies. We conduct research to improve lives and livelihoods shaped by violent conflict, fragility, and humanitarian emergencies. We believe in the power of data and evidence for understanding and alleviating suffering around the world. We combine quantitative and qualitative methods and work with international partners from multiple disciplines and sectors. More information can be found at www.isdc.org.

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American University of Central Asia (AUCA) is a multi-disciplinary learning community in the American liberal arts tradition with the mission of developing enlightened and impassioned leaders for the transformation of Central Asia. AUCA is the first university in Central Asia to offer US accredited degrees in liberal arts programs through a partnership with Bard College in the United States. With a current enrollment of approximately 1,500 students from over 25 countries AUCA offers students a quality education based on an American college model with a credit-hours system, a liberal arts curriculum and a commitment to freedom of expression and inquiry. The University offers 15 undergraduate educational programs and 10 graduate programs. More information can be found at www.auca.kg.



The World Bank is an international organization dedicated to providing financing, advice and research to developing nations to aid their economic advancement. By giving loans, and offering advice and training in both the private and public sectors, the World Bank aims to eliminate poverty by helping people help themselves. Since the Kyrgyz Republic joined the World Bank in 1992, the Bank's financial assistance has amounted to over US\$2.1 billion. The World Bank support has helped the country to maintain macroeconomic stability, invest in strategic infrastructure, and improve access to social services. More information can be found at www.worldbank.org.



UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. Its mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. UNFPA presence in the Kyrgyz Republic dates back to 1992, and it has assisted the country by supporting the preparation of the first national census, by delivering reproductive health commodities, and by building national capacity in integrated SRH and youth-friendly health services, in the development of policies in youth and gender equality areas, and on data collection and analysis. More information can be found at www.unfpa.org.