

Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law
Annual Conference 2022 - #KPAC22
Hybrid: in-person in The Hague and online

Thursday, 20 October
Reimagining Social Contracts

The social contract: a useful fiction

What is the glue that holds societies together? In the Western tradition of political thought, the answer is often the ‘social contract’: citizens giving up part of their freedom in exchange for a stake in society and collective services.

That contract is a fiction; there is no such document, and every societal arrangement has its own history and form. Humans were never free and unbound in the state of nature. However, it is a useful fiction. It provides us with a common language for the ‘bigger picture’ of what is fair and just; who gets what and who provides it.

As a lens, the social contract asks us to consider what societies provide collectively, who is responsible to provide what to whom, and helps consider both why social organisations are stable (because they suit someone’s interest) and what social and political organisations would be just (because most people would agree to them if they were to called to decide).

‘What We Owe Each Other’, Minouche Shafik

The term ‘social contract’ can be used descriptively, referring to something substantively real; or heuristically, as an aid to analysis. In the international development community, however, it is often used normatively: an ideal that states and societies should aspire to.

Engaged Societies, Responsive States’, UNDP and NOREF

Using this fiction, we see how many countries struggle in coming to inclusive, legitimate and sustainable societal arrangements. Simultaneously, we see that international interveners struggle to achieve their aims because of factors linked to broader societal arrangements or due to the application of Western ideas in societies with different ideological background, culture or history.

Reflecting on this, the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law (KPSRL) community indicated the need to Reimagine Social Contracts.¹ This means supporting indigenous solutions and community responses to Security & Rule of Law (SRoL) arrangements and reflecting on the role Western actors play in doing so.

Convening trends at KPAC22

With this theme, this year’s Annual Conference (‘KPAC22’) brings together several debates and agendas. The UN General Assembly’s [Our Common Agenda](#) calls for the creation of a new social contract on a global scale, while the localisation agenda calls for interventions’ relevance to local, non-Western social contracts and a bigger role for citizens in decision-making. The adaptative management agenda shares the acknowledgement of such complex, unpredictable and holistic societal dynamics.

In addition to these process-oriented trends, Reimagining Social Contracts aims to explore alternatives to the new wave of authoritarian governments. It also invites participants to see the SRoL sector through a whole-of-society lens, which dismantles our thematic silos and highlights linkages with wider challenges, such as the climate crisis, food security, access to education or employment. Finally,

¹ For more background information, see our KPSRL 2022 Thematic Headline [here](#).

the emphasis on power and inclusion intends to ensure that voices of vulnerable groups that are systematically excluded in current social arrangements will not be overlooked at KPAC22.

Objectives: Reinvent, Rearrange and Renegotiate

As always, we want KPAC22 to be a dynamic space where people share or develop their innovative ideas throughout the day, engaging colleagues from different parts of the sector and through all kinds of inspiring methods and session formats.

Our use of the verb ‘reimagining’ includes a series of interconnected moments and actions, although in practice never chronological nor separate. Three key points of reimagining below are envisioned to constitute the ‘flow of the day’ for KPAC22 and are thus central in our call for contributions:

Reinvent: The first step is a more theoretical exploration of the concept and its history, which also includes ‘unlearning’ the problematic assumptions, based on the knowledge of those it affects. We need to reinvent this flawed wheel: here you are dared to dream big (or wake us up), allowed to be conceptual in your innovative reimaginings and encouraged to take creative steps forward into the unknown.

Rearrange: This step is all about relationships and organization. Let’s rearrange our ways of collaborating with communities, partners and stakeholders, restructure the SRoL sector’s traditional chains and alliances, and shift participation for political settlements – toward more equal structures. This also entails engaging communities, shifting the power in partnerships, and using our leverage at the negotiating table to open spaces for those whom our actions affect the most.

Renegotiate: This is where we get to action, through interventions and practical tools or instruments. Many of us have already put our reimagined ideas into action successfully, so in this more technical step, we learn from each other’s approaches. This is also where tools and instruments are shared to e.g. analyse situations and needs, fund innovatively or measure progress to adapt iteratively.

Process & Key Dates

In the run up to the Conference, the KPSRL will also organize a series of events and deliverables to introduce and discuss the concept of social contracts from different perspectives. Scheduled events include a kick-off webinar on 6 July, a podcast episode about feminist climate action, as well as a call for artists and activists to creatively explore our theme. To stay up to date and engage in events prior to the KPAC, please subscribe to and keep an eye out for our [KPSRL Newsletter](#).

Following the run up events, KPAC22 will culminate as a hybrid event with in-person, hybrid, and online sessions on Thursday, 20 October 2022. To submit a session idea, proposal or register as a participant, see the timeline and hyperlinks below:

Session Proposals submission	Thursday, 23 June – Sunday, 17 July (submit idea here)
Attendee Registration	Thursday, 7 July
Session Selection Announced	Thursday, 28 July
Annual Conference	Thursday, 20 October