



## **KPSRL Thematic Headline 2023: Towards Just Social Contracts**

### **Deepening three sub-themes of the social contract on a more operational level**

In 2022, the KPSRL network explored the Thematic Headline 'Reimagine Social Contracts'. The discussions, research projects, and recommendations are bundled in an [analytical paper](#).

As this analytical paper shows, discussions all but concluded. The KPSRL community has voted to deepen this conversation in 2023 with a focus on operationalizing the concept for practical purposes. After reimagining what could be, 2023 will be dedicated to learning how Security & Rule of Law (SRoL) support can strengthen social contracts<sup>1</sup> in that imagined direction. To focus the new trajectory, the KPSRL Secretariat proposes three tracks to guide contributions from the KPSRL network.

This short document presents the guiding tracks, process, and practical information on how to contribute to the trajectory.

### **Guiding tracks**

#### **1) Participatory and inclusive social contracts**

In many contemporary societies, people hold the ideal that social contracts should benefit everyone somewhat fairly. Although fairness and equality have many dimensions and interpretations and it's difficult to agree across society, there is a perception that too vast inequality has consequences for peace and justice.

Unequal distribution of resources (welfare, natural resources etc.) can provoke hostility between haves and have nots. Unequal protection can drive some into violent revenge and others into vulnerability. Unequal access to rights can dissolve public trust in institutions or leaders and prevent some from reaching their goals in life and contributing to society. Unequal participation can distort representation, privileging some interests and needs over others.

Managing inequality is therefore an essential part of moving towards just social contracts. This sub-theme delves into SRoL-related ways of understanding the link between exclusion / inequality and peace / justice.

Examples of what KPSRL network contributions may entail:

- Practical approaches and tools to address intersectional inequality (e.g. operationalizing a feminist foreign policy).
- Exploring what 'people centered' justice systems concretely look like in different contexts.
- Practical role of and specific ways to engage the private sector in promoting respect for the rule of law, access to rights and justice, and employing opportunities in situations of fragility.
- Tools to innovate, deepen, and adapt multi-stakeholder and democratic forms of governance for situations of fragility.

#### **2) Authoritarian social contracts and the security sector**

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<sup>1</sup> In the analytical paper, '*social contract*' is described as: the process by which people in positions of power (including both formal and informal authorities) and people and organizations challenging for power and social change, make promises to or agreements with society that raise expectations on the exercise of political authority. When these expectations are met, authority is considered across society to be legitimate, which builds consent and cooperation.

Authoritarian regimes can be based on a certain measure of consent, achieved through promises of security, stability and economic growth for (specific groups within) society, or through ideology. Nevertheless, repression of society's demands and opposition is a key characteristic of the authoritarian social contract. Authoritarian actors maintain – and need - the allegiance of their security sectors, which act violently and repressively to maintain the status quo. Such dynamics are not just applicable to state authorities, but also to social contracts beyond the state such as non-state armed groups or systems based on social control.

This sub-theme therefore concerns understanding the balance of consent and repression that sustain authoritarian actors. It entails methods of recruitment and training in the security services, understanding the experience of security by citizens, how to broaden civic and democratic space under repression, and the room for maneuver of the international community in relation to such actors.

Examples of what KPSRL network contributions may entail:

- Tools to understand the extent of and reasons for consent enjoyed by authoritarian regimes.
- Insights into the lived experience of members of security forces, including the reasons and limits of their allegiance and interpretation of their roles – exploring potential room for reforms.
- New forms of (resistance to) repressive measures and shrinking civic space and how they transform security sector relations with communities and, state-society relations in general.
- Tools to better understand the dynamics of the relationship between security sector and communities, and, if possible, bridging the gap between communities and security sector actors.
- Discussing cases that exemplify if, when, and how inter-governmental organisations could or should continue to engage with authoritarian regimes in areas of security service reform and related.

### 3) Resilience to polarization

At the core of the idea of a sustainable social contract lies the capacity to create consent for the legitimate exercise of power and organization of society. Social and political fragmentation, at both geopolitical and national levels, must not preclude this capacity to create consent across the political spectrum on a core set of guiding principles. Strong polarization worsens mistrust and undermines societal resilience. Society's stability might be at risk when perceptions of fairness, legitimacy, identity, and interests differ too much between social groups.

At the international level, multilateral cooperation is crumbling and a multipolarity of powers emerges, making it more difficult to address shared challenges such as climate change or conflict. International actors' interests either clash in FCAS (Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings), forcing partners to pick sides, or offer elites in FCAS agency through varying 'offers' for the direction of their SRoL.

On a national level, polarization is further propelled by rapidly rising economic inequality, deep cultural differences on sensitive issues of civil rights, political ideals, and the urgency of the green transition. (Fake) information bubbles contribute to not seeing ideas different from one's own or being unable to distinguish facts from invention.

Under authoritarian regimes, polarization could mean increased repression of one side of the debate. In FCAS, it could contribute further to conflict or prevent reconciliation after conflict.



This sub-theme, therefore, focuses on understanding the cases where polarization has consequences for peace and justice. Contributions may discuss:

- Practical examples and tools for SRoL stakeholders to better understand, diagnose and anticipate polarization's impact on peace and stability.
- Actionable/replicable community or multi-stakeholder models for resilience in the face of intolerance, exclusion and violence.
- Tools for negotiating policy improvements on polarizing topics (such as gender equality or freedom of sexual orientation in conservative countries).
- Unexpected positive effects of polarization, such as examples of enhanced democratic processes (balancing effect of polarization) and how to practically leverage them.

## Process

The 2023 trajectory will unfold through a series of open webinars events April and October 2023, the programme of the Annual Conference 2023 in October 2023, a window of the Knowledge Management Fund, and the drafting of an analytical paper at the end of the year to bring together the insights of the trajectory.

1. Events take different forms. Usually, a lead speaker or panel of speakers introduce a topic, experience, or method for discussion and then open the floor for discussion with participants (but other models are possible and welcome). We expect events to delve deeper into the three subthemes above. For example, the Secretariat is planning an event on polarization dynamics in Eastern Europe, the Dutch feminist foreign policy, and the experience of social protest movements in hybrid regimes. We welcome your proposals for additional events (see practical information below).
2. At the Annual Conference 2023, the stage will be yours for one entire day to present and absorb insights and reflections relevant to the three guiding themes. The Secretariat will release a call for conference sessions in the upcoming weeks.
3. Through our Knowledge Management Fund, we seek to support reflective and practical learning initiatives with up to EUR 20,000 in funding, particularly those taking place in FCAS and/or societies that are in the process of (de/re)constructing their social contract. The Secretariat will also release a call for conference sessions in the upcoming weeks.
4. Finally, following the Annual Conference, we plan to take stock of all insights generated during 2023, with a focus on highlights concrete guidance to operationalize the social contract concept into use.

## Practical information on proposing events for the social contract trajectory

**You can propose to host an event session for the KPSRL network by submitting [this form](#) by 8 May, 2023.** The KPSRL Secretariat will be happy to support you in shaping the agenda and connecting with additional panelists or speakers. We are especially interested in events to be organized in partner countries in the Global South, and have reserved a small fund to support costs made (e.g. the venue) for those events.

Follow us on [Twitter](#) & [LinkedIn](#) for upcoming announcements related to the [Knowledge Management Fund](#) and our [Annual Conference](#), and feel free to reach out with your initiatives, contributions and ideas.

*If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to e-mail [info@kpsrl.org](mailto:info@kpsrl.org).*