

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

A HANDBOOK ON THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



The right to protest belongs to everyone

Organizing and participating in a peaceful demonstration to express one's opinion, i.e. the right to protest, is a fundamental and universal human right. Civil society's previous achievements, such as the right of women to vote, annual leave for employees, and global civil rights, demonstrate that democracy is not possible without the freedom to unite, assemble, and voice opposition or support for societal developments.

The right to assemble for a common cause and to demonstrate and express one's demands for the government is also vital to defend other human rights. The right to protest must be defended and exercised with determination, especially now as human rights are threatened by the climate crisis, incitement to hatred, and authoritarian leaders.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties guarantee freedom of assembly and expression. Although these rights have traditionally been successfully realized in Finland, global trends affect us as well. Disproportionate force has been used against peaceful assemblies and faulty interpretations have been made about the limits of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in the public debate.

At Amnesty, we believe that it is crucial to protect the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and opinion now, while these rights are still vital.

We want to defend these rights and to encourage and support everyone who uses them. This handbook by Amnesty International Finnish section serves as an introduction to freedom of assembly, both as a legal concept and as an essential democratic tool. It offers information on the legal foundations of the right to protest and insight into the rights and responsibilities of both organizers of demonstrations and those who participate in them. This handbook also lists duties of the police and other authorities, principles of non-violent civil disobedience as well as practical advice for organizing a successful and impactful demonstration.

Whether you are planning on organizing a demonstration or attending one, we hope this handbook provides answers to your questions. Legal interpretations of human rights and their actual exercise in real life do not always align, but it is through their use that freedoms are best developed. History has proven that protests can change the world – and those in power must accept it.

Know your rights and hold on to them.

Table of contents

What is the right to protest? The legal basis for freedom of assembly	04
Everyone is guaranteed the right to peaceful assembly and expression under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	05
States are obliged to respect international treaties	06
The interpretation of human rights treaties and other standards by human rights bodies	08
Freedom of assembly is a fundamental right in Finland	09
When and how can freedom of assembly be restricted?	10
Restricting the freedom of assembly requires weighty arguments	11
Everyone has the right to peaceful protest	16
Non-violent civil disobedience	17
Police rights and obligations	18
The authorities must strive for peaceful assemblies to succeed	19
The use of force by police and police equipment	20
My rights and responsibilities as an organizer of a demonstration	22
Before the demonstration	23
During the demonstration	25
After the demonstration	26
My rights and responsibilities as a participant of a demonstration	28
Before the demonstration	29
During the demonstration	29
After the demonstration	29
How to deal with conflict	30
Tools for de-escalation	30
What if I think that my rights have been violated?	31
How to organize a demonstration that has an impact	32



WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO PROTEST? THE LEGAL BASIS FOR FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY



- The right to participate in and influence decision-making is the foundation of a democratic and pluralistic society that respects human rights and rule of law.
- The right to freedom of assembly and freedom of opinion and expression are fundamental human rights. Without them, it would be impossible to demand the recognition and implementation of other human rights.
- People have the right to come together and make claims, criticize, and speak truth to their governments.

Everyone is guaranteed the right to peaceful assembly and expression under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The right to protest is based on the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, enshrined in [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and international human rights treaties. Even though the Declaration is not a legally binding instrument like international treaties, it is the foundation of the entire modern human rights system. Many rights included in the Declaration are generally accepted as customary law, making them binding on all states. Even if a state is not a party to a particular human rights treaty, it may be held responsible for the fulfillment of human rights included in the Declaration. Freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are also safeguarded by the Constitution of Finland.

§ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

ARTICLE 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

ARTICLE 20

Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of peaceful assembly refers to everyone's right to gather in a public space for a common cause, such as for meetings, strikes, or demonstrations. People have the right to assemble peacefully without, for example, the fear of getting arrested.

States are obliged to allow peaceful assemblies without unnecessary interference, as well as to facilitate the exercise of freedom of assembly and protect the participants. For this freedom to be realized in full, other rights must be protected, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of political participation. Everyone should have freedom of peaceful assembly without discrimination.

States are **obliged to respect** international treaties

Amnesty's standpoints on human rights issues are based on international human rights law including treaties and their interpretations, e.g., by UN treaty bodies and international courts.

The right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are safeguarded by international and regional human rights treaties, among others. [The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) has been ratified by more than 170 countries, committed to respect the freedom of assembly and freedom of opinion and expression. Any restrictions to the Covenant rights must be necessary and prescribed by law. [The Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) grants children the same rights. It has been ratified by 196 countries.

The 46 member states of the Council of Europe have also adopted [the European Convention on Human Rights](#), which is monitored by the European Court of Human Rights. Anyone who thinks that their rights have been violated can take a case to the Court, if they cannot obtain justice through domestic courts.

The European Union also has its legally binding [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), which guarantees the rights to freedom of assembly and expression to European Union citizens and EU residents.



§ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ARTICLE 19

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in the previous paragraph carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: **1)** For respect of the rights or reputations of others; **2)** For the protection of national security or public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

ARTICLE 21

The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law, and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The interpretation of human rights treaties and other standards by human rights bodies

Since treaties are kept short and concise, they are sometimes difficult to interpret simply by reading the plain text. General recommendations and comments by human rights treaty bodies facilitate their interpretation. While these general comments are not legally binding, they should be followed by the signatory states.

In 2020, the United Nations Human Rights Committee¹ [issued a general comment](#) (General comment no. 37) on the right of peaceful assembly. It specifies, for instance, the definition of a peaceful demonstration and the circumstances in which the freedom of peaceful assembly may be restricted. It also addresses freedom of peaceful assembly in online environments.

International and regional human rights bodies, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, also produce standards and guidelines that facilitate the implementation of human rights agreements. [The Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly](#) by OSCE and the Venice Commission and guidelines and standards for the use of force by police are essential when it comes to demonstrations and freedom of peaceful assembly.

The decisions of the European Court of Human Rights are also of great importance. The Court's binding decisions have, for instance, led to specifications concerning a state's positive obligation to enable the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly by protecting it from external interference, such as counterdemonstrations.



Freedom of assembly is a **fundamental right** in Finland

Chapter 2 of [the Constitution of Finland](#) lists fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

- Everyone has the right to arrange meetings and demonstrations without a permit, as well as the right to participate in them.
- Everyone has the freedom of expression.

The Constitution of Finland also provides for the protection of fundamental rights and liberties.

- The public authorities shall guarantee the observance of fundamental rights and liberties and human rights.

More detailed provisions on the exercise of the freedom of assembly are laid down by the [Assembly Act](#).

- The Assembly Act guarantees the exercise of the freedom of assembly and lays down the necessary regulatory provisions on the arrangement of public meetings (such as demonstrations).
- A public meeting shall be arranged peacefully, without compromising the safety of the participants or bystanders and without infringing their rights. Care shall be taken that the assembly does not cause significant damage to the environment.

The Assembly Act outlines **the rights and responsibilities of the organizer of a public meeting**. It defines the rights to organize and participate in a public meeting and specifies locations where such meetings can be held. By law, the organizer also has a **duty of notification**.

The organizer of a public meeting must take care of **maintaining order and security during the event, as well as compliance with the law**. The organizer must interrupt the meeting or order it to disperse, if continuing the meeting would cause immediate danger to the safety of the people, property or the environment.

The organizer may appoint persons to maintain order. After the event, it is the organizer's responsibility to make sure that equipment and constructions are removed, and cleaning is taken care of.

Public authorities must **protect and promote fundamental rights**: they must promote the exercise of the freedom of assembly by protecting it from outside interference and by creating appropriate conditions for meetings.



WHEN AND HOW CAN FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY BE RESTRICTED?

Freedom of assembly is a fundamental right that may be restricted only for specific well-defined reasons. Restrictions must be in line with international human rights treaties and their interpretation, as well as domestic legislation .

Restricting fundamental and human rights

The freedom of assembly, together with many of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Finnish Constitution and international human rights treaties that Finland is obliged to observe, is not absolute and may be restricted by law in certain conditions. Acceptable conditions may include the protection of the rights of other individuals or overriding social interests, such as national security. However, there are certain absolute fundamental and human rights that cannot be restricted or derogated from in any circumstances. These include the prohibition against torture and the right to life. Discriminating restrictions are also forbidden.

Restricting the freedom of assembly **requires weighty arguments**

According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, freedom of assembly may only be restricted for reasons related to

- the protection of national security, public safety or public order
- the protection of public health
- the protection of morals or
- the protection of the rights and freedoms of others

Restrictions on the freedom of assembly must be imposed in conformity with the **law** and must be **necessary**, meaning that the same result cannot be achieved through other means. Furthermore, these restrictions must be **proportionate**, i.e., it needs to be considered whether the benefits outweigh the harm caused to the freedom of assembly. The threshold for restricting peaceful assemblies must be kept high.

Restrictions must not be discriminatory, impair the essence of the right, or be aimed at discouraging participation in assemblies or causing a chilling effect. Banning all assemblies in a certain city or for a certain period of time is presumptively a disproportionate limitation and prohibiting a demonstration in advance should only be a last resort. **Restrictions must be based on differentiated or individualized assessment².**



² General comment no. 37 by the United Nations Human Rights Committee paragraphs 36-38.

Further, restrictions protecting public safety, public order, or the rights and freedoms of others must be necessary and proportionate. Peaceful assemblies **can sometimes be inherently or deliberately disruptive**, which can require a significant degree of toleration. A demonstration may for example cause disruption of traffic. **This means that disturbances need to be significant for freedom of assembly to be restricted³.**

Restrictions protecting “morals” cannot be based on a single group’s perceptions of morality and must be understood in the light of the universality of human rights, pluralism and the principle of non-discrimination. General comment no. 37 states, for instance, that restrictions may not be imposed because of opposition to expressions of sexual orientation or gender identity. Authorities also need to safeguard the expression of unpopular beliefs and protect peaceful demonstrators.

In addition to international human rights treaties, our domestic law also allows restrictions of the right to freedom of assembly. The general criteria for limiting fundamental rights enshrined in the Finnish Constitution⁴ are closely related to the general criteria for restricting human rights, which means that the restrictions must be necessary, proportionate, and prescribed by law. Restricting fundamental rights may not conflict with Finland’s international human rights obligations.

³ General comment no. 37 by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, paragraph 44.

⁴ The Constitutional Law Committee of the Finnish Parliament has formulated general criteria used to assess situations where restrictions on fundamental rights may be necessary. The list consists of seven conditions that all need to be met for limitations to be considered acceptable. https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Mietinto/Documents/pevm_25+1994.pdf





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EXAMPLE: The city of Ankara bans LGBTI events

In March 2017, Ankara governor's office imposed an indefinite ban on all LGBTI events. According to the governor of Ankara, LGBTI rights are a *"socially sensitive topic that may incite hatred and pose an imminent risk to public security, and therefore a ban is necessary to prevent crimes, protect health and morality and other people's rights and freedoms"*.

The ban was imposed while Türkiye was in a state of emergency but was not lifted when the state of emergency ended in July 2018. Eventually, the ban was overturned in April 2019 by a court decision. According to the court, the ban was unlawful and restricted rights and freedoms in unconditional, vague, and disproportionate ways. The court emphasized that authorities must protect peaceful assemblies and events, even when there are concerns that they may provoke opposition, rather than simply ban them.



According to human rights organizations, the ban was discriminating and unfounded. However, this did not end the ban of LGBTI events in Türkiye, as authorities in many cities have prohibited Pride marches and other events later on⁵.



⁵<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/25/turkey-ankara-wakes-court-lifting-lgbti-events-ban#:~:text=An%20Ankara%20court%20has%20finally,%2C%20vague%2C%20and%20disproportionate%20ways.>

<https://www.amnesty.at/media/6978/human-rights-in-europe-online-final.pdf>
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/14/turkey-end-ankara-ban-lgbti-events>

EXAMPLE: Freedom of assembly and the right to health

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have imposed strict restrictions, e.g., on the freedom of assembly and the freedom of movement to prevent transmission. In many cases, these restrictions have not met the requirements of necessity and proportionality and have [violated the right to freedom of assembly](#).

Finland, too, has had to consider to what extent other fundamental rights can be restricted, to ensure the right to health for everyone. During the pandemic, freedom of assembly was restricted first in the entire country and later in areas with the highest prevalence of COVID-19 cases as it was considered a necessary measure to prevent the spread of the pandemic. At times, gatherings of more than ten or even six people were banned. These restrictions were based on the Communicable Diseases Act, where section 58 authorizes the Regional State Administrative Agency to prohibit public gatherings and events. The decision is valid for a month, and measures need to be discontinued once the risk of transmission is over.

According to General comment no. 37 by the Human Rights Committee, protection of public health may provide an exceptional ground for restricting freedom of assembly, e.g., when gatherings might spread disease. The General comment also states that even if states normally should refrain from limiting the number of participants in assemblies, this may be justified in situations where protecting public health requires physical distancing.

The imposition of any restrictions should be guided by the objective of facilitating the right to peaceful protest. Measures affecting public protest must be applied consistently compared to other activities that the authorities are permitting. Each assembly should be assessed on case-by-case basis to allow for measures to be considered that prevent contagion without a need to prohibit the entire assembly.



Everyone has the right to **peaceful** protest

Human rights treaties only guarantee the right to **peaceful assembly**. Assemblies in which the organizers or participants intend to use violence or incite the use of violence are not protected under freedom of assembly. Nonetheless, **authorities should adhere to the presumption that the demonstration is peaceful** unless there is convincing evidence that the organizers or participants intend to use violence or incite it.

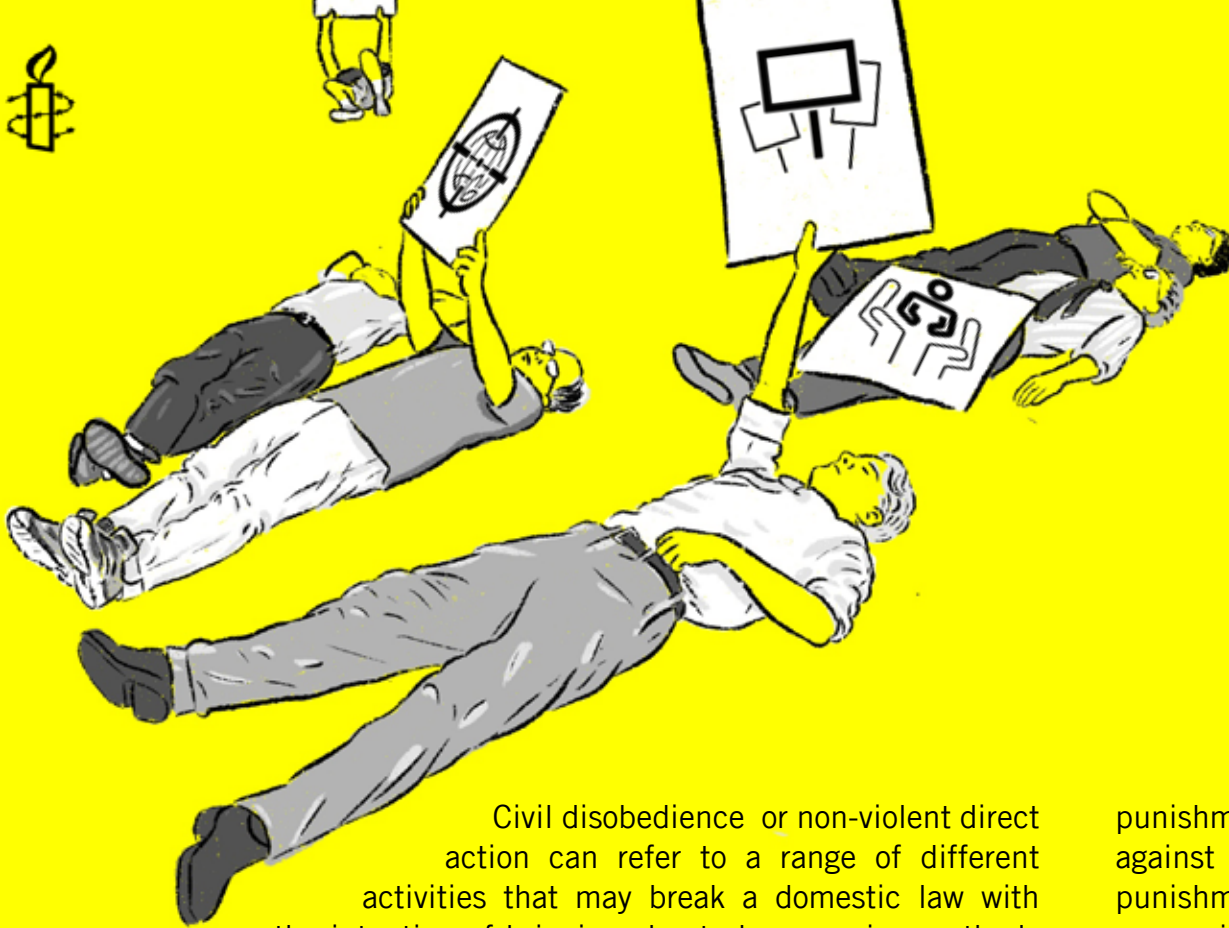
What is the meaning of “**peaceful**”?⁶

- ✓ A non-violent assembly is considered peaceful, even if it would annoy or offend individuals or groups who disagree with the messages or demands of the demonstration.
- ✓ An assembly can be peaceful, even if it is “unlawful” under domestic law or despite participants breaking the law, e.g., by not following police orders. Demonstrations may cause traffic disruptions, for example.
- ✓ A largely peaceful demonstration will not lose the protection of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly even if a small group of participants engages in violent acts. Isolated acts of violence are not a sufficient reason to disperse a demonstration. Violence by non-participants (like counterdemonstrators or bystanders) does not render the assembly non-peaceful.
- ✓ It is the responsibility of the authorities to prove that the organizer’s intentions are violent. Violent incidents at previous gatherings by the same organizer are not sufficient evidence. The possession of protective gear, such as a gas mask or helmet, does not prove violent intentions.
- ✓ Violence is usually defined as the use by participants of physical force against others that is likely to result in injury or death or serious damage to property. Mere pushing and shoving or disruption of vehicular or pedestrian movement or daily activities do not amount to violence.
- ✓ Peaceful assemblies may not be used for discrimination, hostility, or incitement to violence⁷. Even if such incidents occur, action should be taken against the individual perpetrators, rather than against the assembly as a whole. The use of flags or symbols is generally a legitimate form of expression, unless such symbols are directly or predominantly associated with incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence.

⁶ General comment no. 37 by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, e.g., paragraphs 15-20; OSCE and the Venice Commission’s instructions on the right of peaceful assembly.

⁷ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 20:

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence shall be prohibited by law.



NON-VIOLENT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Civil disobedience or non-violent direct action can refer to a range of different activities that may break a domestic law with the intention of bringing about change using methods of disruption through direct and non-violent means. Although non-violent direct action involves breaking or disobeying the law, these methods may still fall under the scope of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly as ways to defend, e.g., human rights or the environment.

Amnesty defends people whose rights are violated as a result of using civil disobedience or non-violent direct action. Activists who use such tactics are usually aware of possible legal consequences and are prepared to bear them. However, many states have responded to non-violent resistance with disproportionate criminal charges. Activists engaging in civil disobedience who receive a harsher

punishment than others for the same offence are discriminated against based on their political opinions. Even the threat of punishment can have a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

According to General comment no. 37 by the UN Human Rights Committee, collective civil disobedience or direct action campaigns can be covered by the right to peaceful assembly, provided that they are non-violent. Similarly, The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE urges member states to respond to non-violent direct action with proportionate sanctions.



POLICE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

Police duties during demonstrations are outlined in detail in the Assembly Act. According to [the Assembly Act](#), the organizer of a public meeting must take care of the maintenance of order and security and compliance with the law in the event. **The police have the duty to safeguard the exercise of freedom of assembly.** The police also monitor that organizers fulfil their duties under the Assembly Act and undertake measures for the maintenance of order and security where necessary.

The authorities must strive for **peaceful assemblies to succeed**

Authorities should strive for the success of peaceful assemblies. When issuing instructions and orders, the police must pay regard to their obligation to promote and protect the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly. The police should promote dialogue between different parties, de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes. The police must also protect journalists, observers, and medical personnel⁸.

Where necessary, the police may issue instructions and orders on the arrangement of a public meeting, in advance or during the event, but only

- to maintain public order or security
- to prevent damage to health, property, or the environment, or to reduce the damage to the environment
- to safeguard the rights of bystanders or
- to ensure the free flow of traffic.

Arrangement of public meetings or events cannot be restricted by orders that are not necessary. Restrictions imposed by police orders also need to be proportionate to their objective. Police should primarily give advice and instructions instead of issuing binding orders⁹. Disobeying police orders can result in fines or criminal prosecution.

A senior police officer has the right to interrupt a public meeting or order it to disperse, if other measures have not proven adequate and continuing the meeting would cause immediate danger to the safety of people, property, or the environment, and in situations where the public meeting is being essentially unlawfully arranged.

Assemblies may be dispersed only in exceptional cases. Isolated acts of violence, for instance, are not a justified reason. A peaceful assembly that causes a high level of disruption may only be dispersed if the disruption is serious and sustained¹⁰.

⁸General comment by the UN Human Rights Committee, paragraphs 74, 76.

⁹HE 145/1998, the Finnish government's proposal for the Assembly Act.

¹⁰General comment by the UN Human Rights Committee, paragraph 85.

The use of force by police and police equipment

The Police Act regulates the duties, powers and obligations of the police. According to the Act, the police must respect fundamental and human rights and follow the principle of proportionality and least harm. The law also sets limits for the use of force by police.

During demonstrations, the police may use force if it is deemed necessary to calm down or stop an incident or act. However, **the use of force is a last resort**, if advice and orders prove insufficient. The police should utilize the most moderate means available in view of the situation. In a demanding situation, the police may use equipment for applying force.¹¹

The Police Act states that the police have the right to use necessary forms of force that can be considered justifiable **for the purpose of carrying out a task**. When judging the justifiability of force, the police must consider e.g., the danger posed by the resistance and the importance and urgency of the assignment. If possible and appropriate, a person needs to be warned about the possibility of being subjected to the use of force.

The police may also ask the participant to establish their identity or perform a security search for a valid reason, such as searching for dangerous objects or substances.

After receiving a notification of a demonstration, the police should assess threats and means to address them. The police should also make sure there are enough personnel and proper equipment on hand to fulfil their duties during the demonstration.



Police field uniform

¹¹<https://poliisi.fi/en/public-meetings-and-demonstrations>



Crowd control police gear

Police equipment can be divided into two categories: protective equipment and equipment for applying force. Crowd control police carry heavier gear than ordinary police. **Every police officer on duty should carry an identification tag.** An officer must present their badge upon request, as long as it doesn't prevent them from performing their duties. Police vehicles must also be identifiable.

Safety gear is intended to keep the police safe while performing duties. Police may use physical force, such as escort holds, during demonstrations. Police equipment for applying force (or “less-lethal” weapons) include, for example, electroshock weapons, sprays and gases (including OC spray), police dogs, batons, and FN 303 compressed-air powered launchers (riot gun).

The use of police force is subject to a number of international guidelines and standards, including the [“United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement”](#). These UN guidelines provide guidance on how “less lethal” weapons designed for crowd control may be used in a way that is proportionate and justified. For instance, chemical irritants, such as OC spray, should not be used in situations of purely passive resistance, or in situations where the police already have control of the situation. As stated in General Comment No. 37 by the Human Rights Committee, the type of force that is likely to cause more than negligible injury should not be used against passively resisting individuals or groups.

Any allegations of unlawful use of force or other police misconduct should be investigated properly, immediately, and independently by the state.



MY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN **ORGANIZER** OF A DEMONSTRATION

The Constitution of Finland guarantees the right to freedom of assembly, which includes the right to arrange and participate in demonstrations. When arranging a demonstration, the organizer and participants have also certain responsibilities.

The Assembly Act defines the responsibilities of the organizer. **As a rule, adults who have reached the age of 18 can organize demonstrations.** People between 15 and 17 years of age can arrange demonstrations if they are capable of fulfilling the responsibilities of an organizer. A person under 15 years of age may arrange public meetings together with an adult.

BEFORE THE DEMONSTRATION


Planning a demonstration, **it is important to keep in mind** that the Assembly Act stipulates that **it is the organizer's responsibility to take care of maintaining order and security** and compliance with the law during the event.


Human rights treaties only guarantee the right to **peaceful assembly**. Meetings where the organizer or participants have violent intentions or incite violence do not fall under the scope of freedom of assembly.


Notify the police of your demonstration, at the latest 24 hours prior to the event.


After receiving notification of a demonstration, the police often contact the organizer with further questions concerning, e.g., estimated turnout, the need for traffic arrangements and the duration of the demonstration.

Demonstrations can also be arranged without prior notification.

 The police may disclose the name of the organizer of a demonstration if the organizer is an association, organization, other corporation or association or another legally competent legal person. If the organizer is a private person, publishing the name may in some cases be prohibited by the Act on the Openness of Government Activities.

 **The police may give instructions and orders prior to and during the demonstration** e.g., to maintain order and security, to protect the environment or the rights of bystanders, or to ensure a free flow of traffic.

 **A demonstration may be arranged outdoors in a marketplace, a square, a street area, or some other suitable space.** If the demonstration is held in a public place, there is no need for permission from the landowner or property manager. If the assembly could cause unreasonable harm to the property owner or occupant, the property itself or the environment, the owner or occupant can limit the use of the area.

 **The police may relocate or reschedule the demonstration, after having negotiated with the contact person,** if several public meetings are notified to be arranged in the same place at the same time, or if organizing a demonstration in the notified place will, for instance, compromise the safety of people or cause unreasonable inconvenience.

BEFORE THE DEMONSTRATION

Maintaining order during the demonstration

- The organizer must take care of maintaining order and security during the event. There is no general obligation for the organizer to appoint security stewards. However, it is recommended that the organizer assesses thoroughly whether they are needed.
- Security stewards should have a license or a separate approval by the police.
- The police may contact the organizer in advance and issue binding orders regarding the need for security stewards. The organizer may wish to request this order to be provided in writing.



Organizing demonstrations should not, however, be restricted by unnecessary measures. The police should primarily give advice and instructions instead of issuing binding orders. Police have the responsibility to protect the exercise of freedom of assembly and police orders should not prevent arrangements from being carried out in practice.

Inviting people to join a demonstration

- Clearly state the purpose of the demonstration: *why do we act?*
- Tell participants to prepare for the demonstration by familiarizing themselves with the theme of the demonstration and their own rights.
- Encourage participants to bring along their ID and to leave at home any equipment that could be mistaken for weapons.

DURING THE DEMONSTRATION



The organizer is responsible for order and safety as well as compliance with the law at the event. The police have a responsibility to safeguard the exercise of freedom of assembly and protect the demonstration from, for example, harassment by bystanders.



The police may issue instructions and orders prior to the demonstration and during the event, e.g., to protect public order and maintain security, reduce damage to the environment, or to safeguard the rights of bystanders and free flow of traffic.



The organizer must interrupt or discontinue the meeting should it cause immediate risk to people, property, or the environment. The police have the right to terminate a public meeting or issue orders to stop the gathering if other measures prove to be insufficient.



People often have the right to use non-violent methods as long as the demonstration is peaceful. However, failure to obey an order issued by a police officer, within their powers is an offence.

The organizer of a demonstration is the contact person for the police during the demonstration.

On-site, make sure that:

- the location is safe for the participants
- no harm is caused to the environment or bystanders

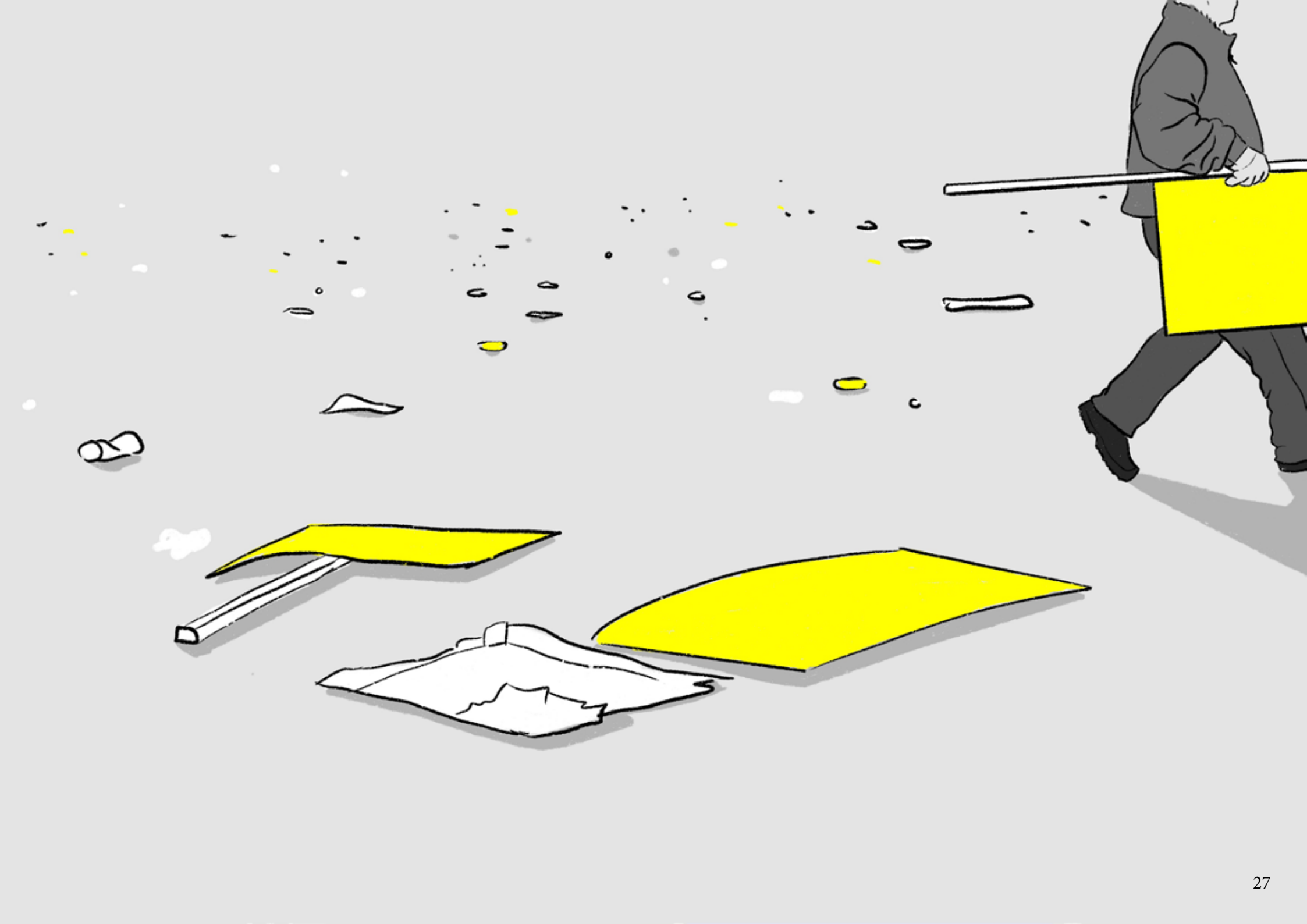
Make sure participants know how to act during the demonstration:

- The demonstration must be peaceful
- Participants must ensure that their actions do not endanger bystanders or the environment
- Participants must know what equipment is used during the demonstration

AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION

Make sure that participants stay safe also once the demonstration ends

- Plan and give instructions on how to leave the demonstration
- Provide guidelines for collecting and returning the equipment used
- Make sure that anything built for the demonstration is removed and that you leave the venue clean**





MY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS **A PARTICIPANT** IN A DEMONSTRATION

Everyone has the right to participate in a demonstration.

BEFORE THE DEMONSTRATION

- Familiarize yourself with the theme of the demonstration, instructions from the organizer, and your own rights.

DURING THE DEMONSTRATION

- Follow guidelines and instructions given by the organizer of the demonstration.
- The police may issue instructions and orders to protect public order and maintain security, or to safeguard the rights of bystanders and free flow of traffic. However, these orders must not prevent the exercise of freedom of assembly.
- Ensure that you are contributing to order and security by respecting other people's space.
- Do not get provoked by the actions of possible counterdemonstrators.
- Keep calm in all situations.

AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION

- Follow instructions given by the organizer of the demonstration, e.g., on safe exit routes and returning equipment.

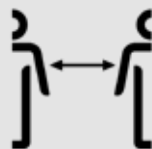


HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT

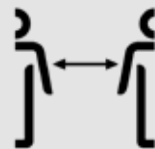
Tools for de-escalation:



Keep your hands visible, **remain calm**, and pay attention to your breathing.



Keep sufficient **distance** from the other person and position your body slightly away from them.



Do not touch the other person, the police or police gear.



Maintain friendly eye contact and **show that you are listening**, e.g., by nodding.



You may also try to **mirror the other person's behavior**, e.g., by initially raising your own voice to the same level as the person you are talking to and then lowering your tone.



Do not interrupt.



Show **empathy** towards the other person's frustration.



Speak in a **calm and composed manner.**



Do not hesitate to **leave** a threatening situation.

By knowing your rights, you are best prepared for conflicts that may arise during a demonstration. Therefore, we recommend that you do a revision of your rights each time before attending a demonstration or arranging one.

Communicating in a calm manner is the best way to maintain personal safety in a conflict. De-escalating communication refers to a means of interaction aimed at calming things down in a threatening situation. The aim is not to solve the conflict, but to protect your physical safety and to restore the situation, so that you and the other person will be able to cool off from being agitated. De-escalating communication can be useful in interaction with the police, other demonstration participants, counterdemonstrators, or, e.g., among friends.

What if I think that my rights have been violated?

You should hold on to your rights and demand that the authorities respect them. Sometimes, however, the exercise of fundamental rights may be prevented, or people's rights may be violated. **It is therefore important to know how to seek justice afterwards.**

It is essential that you write down a description of the situation in which your rights were violated, and circumstances leading up to the situation. A police officer on duty must carry identification and is obliged to present their badge upon request. In case the officer issues an order that you believe to be illegal, make note of the details identifying that particular officer.

If you suspect that the authorities have acted unlawfully, you may file an administrative complaint. You can file a complaint on your own or together with others. You do not need to have a Finnish citizenship to file a complaint. You may also file a complaint about measures that were not targeted at you.

If your complaint is about a police officer working in a specific police department, it is usually sent to the department in question.

If the complaint concerns several units, a police chief, or, e.g., an official within the National Police Board, the complaint should be sent to the National Police Board. Complaints may also be directed to the supreme overseers of legality, i.e., the Parliamentary Ombudsman or the Chancellor of Justice. More about making a complaint can be found on [Suomi.fi](https://suomi.fi) and the web page of the police.

If you suspect that a police officer has committed a crime, you may also file a criminal report. If the administrative authority finds that there may be reason to suspect that the officer has committed a crime, the case is referred to the prosecutor. The prosecutor assesses whether a preliminary investigation should be initiated.

A complaint can also be filed about police orders issued in advance, such as those concerning the appointment of security stewards – these complaints are directed to the administrative court.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A DEMONSTRATION THAT HAS AN IMPACT

What is the main message?

Create a clear message about the aim of your demonstration. Be sure to communicate it to everyone: to the participants and when communicating about the demonstration.

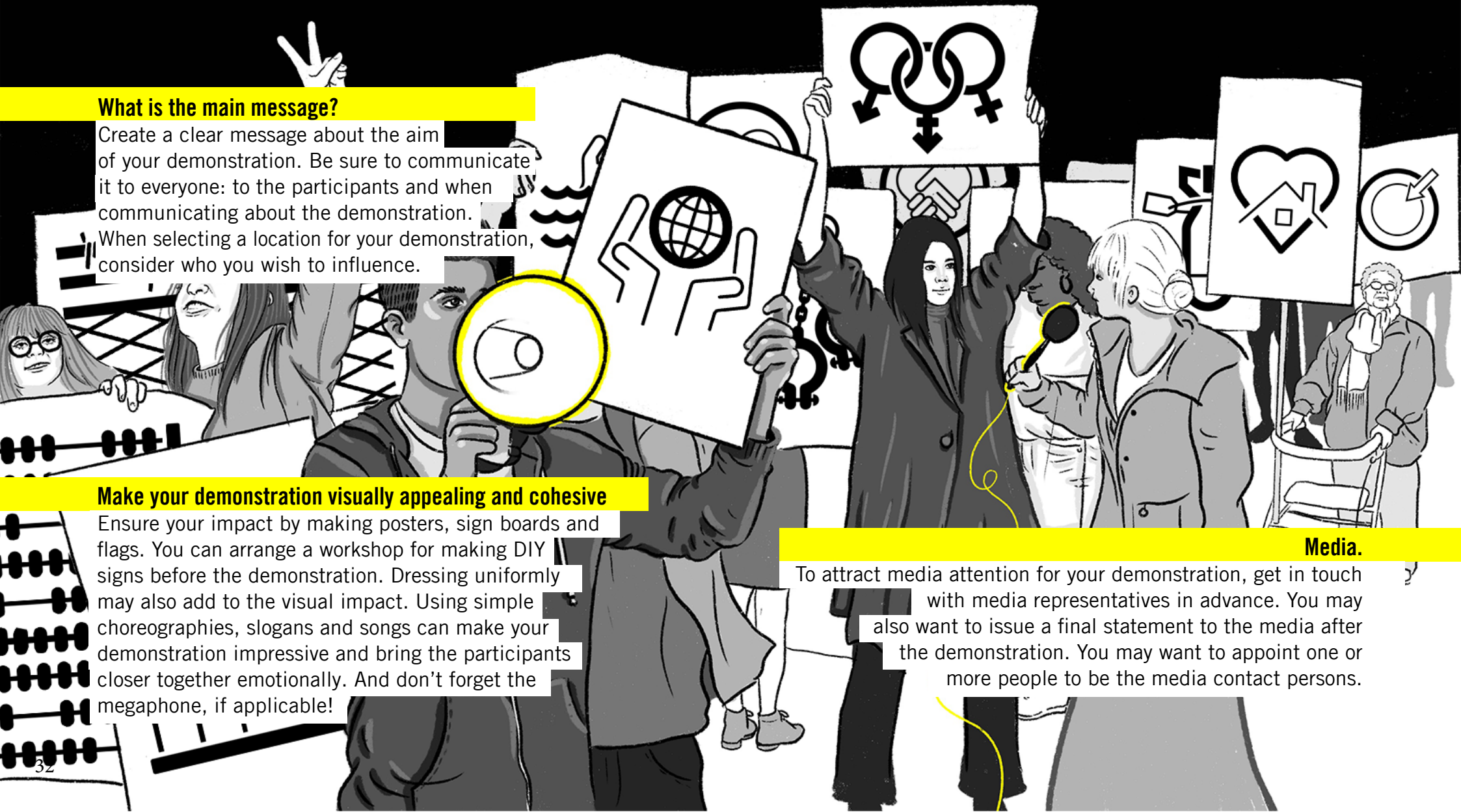
When selecting a location for your demonstration, consider who you wish to influence.

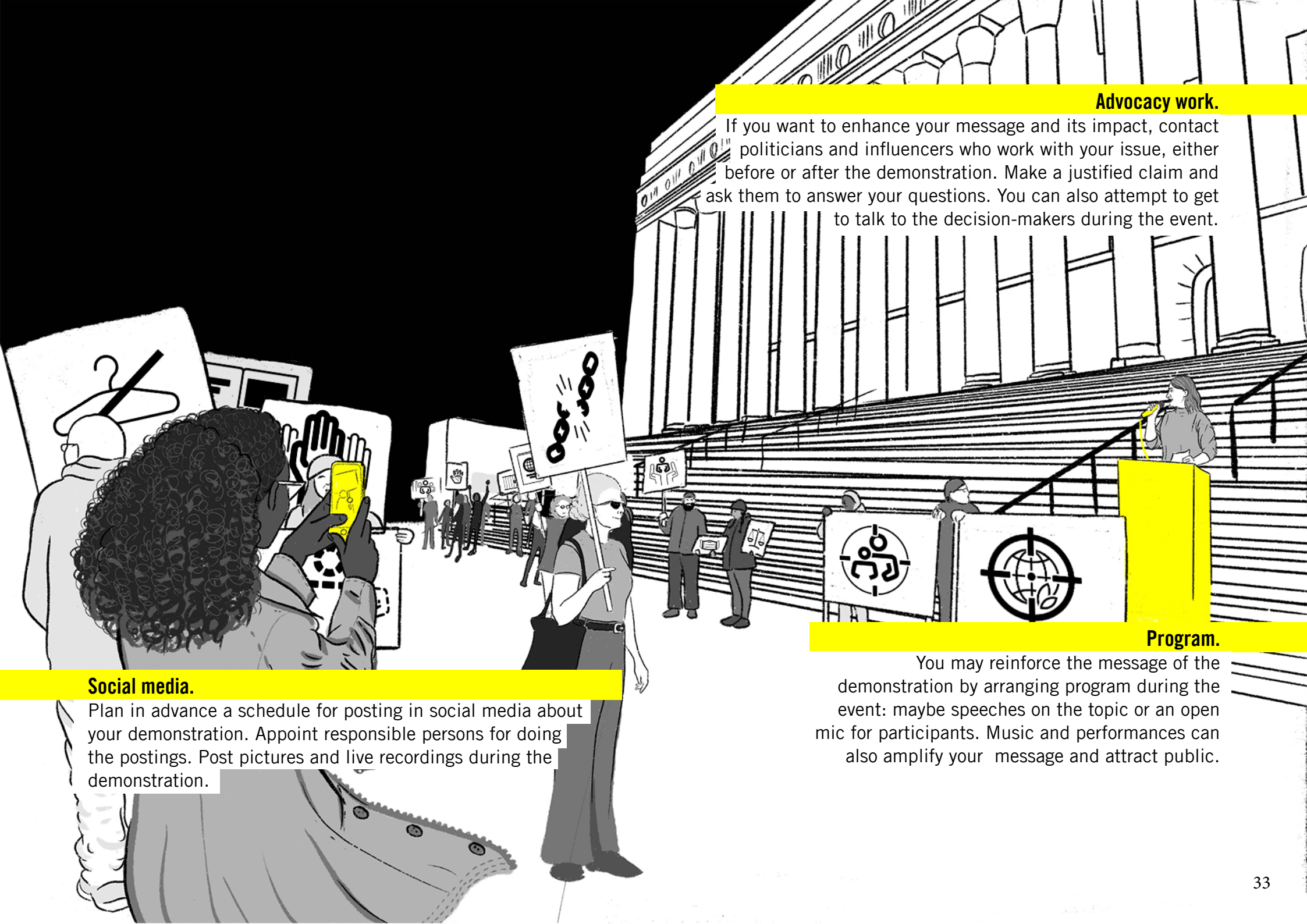
Make your demonstration visually appealing and cohesive

Ensure your impact by making posters, sign boards and flags. You can arrange a workshop for making DIY signs before the demonstration. Dressing uniformly may also add to the visual impact. Using simple choreographies, slogans and songs can make your demonstration impressive and bring the participants closer together emotionally. And don't forget the megaphone, if applicable!

Media.

To attract media attention for your demonstration, get in touch with media representatives in advance. You may also want to issue a final statement to the media after the demonstration. You may want to appoint one or more people to be the media contact persons.





Advocacy work.

If you want to enhance your message and its impact, contact politicians and influencers who work with your issue, either before or after the demonstration. Make a justified claim and ask them to answer your questions. You can also attempt to get to talk to the decision-makers during the event.

Social media.

Plan in advance a schedule for posting in social media about your demonstration. Appoint responsible persons for doing the postings. Post pictures and live recordings during the demonstration.

Program.

You may reinforce the message of the demonstration by arranging program during the event: maybe speeches on the topic or an open mic for participants. Music and performances can also amplify your message and attract public.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE TOPIC!

HERE ARE SOME USEFUL LINKS:

[Guidelines on public meetings and demonstrations on the police's website](#)

[The Assembly Act](#)

[The Police Act](#) (in Finnish)

[The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

[The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)

[The Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

[The European Convention on Human Rights](#)

[The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#)

[General comment No. 37 on the right of peaceful assembly \(article 21\) by the Human Rights Committee](#)

[Guidelines on freedom of peaceful assembly by OSCE and the Venice Commission](#)

[Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials](#)

[United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement](#)

[Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials](#)

[Course: Amnesty Human Rights Academy – The Right to Protest](#)

[Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World](#) (Amnesty's handbook for young activists)

Know your rights and hold on to them.

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