

Police contact and legal observer guide



The purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to give you an insight into the role of the police contact during actions based on the experience we have with activism so far. This guide is not necessarily presenting the true or best way to be a police contact - it's always up to you and your comrades to assess what works best for the action you're in. If you have any comments or feedback to this guide please reach out to us on kontakt@ulydigretshjaelp.dk.

What are the police allowed to do?

At the action the police can disperse crowds if they think that it's a disturbance of public order but according to the law they have to give three warnings before they use force to remove people (this doesn't always happen though). The police have the right to ID you so if they ask the law requires that you tell them your full name, date of birth and address. You don't have to give them the last four numbers of your CPR-number. If you don't have a Danish CPR-number you are also required to show them your passport or another picture ID.

Regarding arrests police can detain people for 15 minutes without giving a reason, they can ask for your name, address and date of birth and they can use the force that they believe are proportional to the situation. If the police arrest people they have to tell them the time and reason for their arrest.

Keep in mind when you communicate with the police that they are there to uphold the law and that they are often trying to figure out who planned or is responsible for the action. They are also allowed to lie to you.



What are your rights with the police?

You have the right to not answer their questions (besides the ID'ing questions) and it's not illegal to lie to the police. You have the right not to incriminate yourself. You can not run from the police if they have told you, that you are in their custody.

Discrimination by the police

We've seen numerous instances where police are discriminating against different groups, most often minoritized groups. It can therefore be a good idea to pay extra attention to how police treat BIPOC people, transgender people, people who don't have Danish citizenship, people with disabilities and people from other minoritized groups. If you witness any discriminative behavior you can try to express it to the police or make the legal observers aware of it so they can document it.

Your safety as a police contact or legal observer

Even though you may consider yourself as out of action as a police contact/legal observer doesn't mean that you can be certain that the police will see it that way which mean that even though the chance is probably lower you might still be charged with something or experience police violence. It is good to be prepared for this and keep an eye out for escalation, consider keeping your distance, and leave the action if you don't feel comfortable any longer.

Debriefing

Debriefing both shortly after the action and a few weeks after can be a good way to process the experiences and feelings you've got during and after the action and is also a way to learn what worked well and what could have gone better. As a police contact you can debrief with the people who were in action but it might also make sense to make a debrief together with the legal observers since you might share some experiences and your roles were related during the action. If the debriefs give you experience or knowledge about the police contact role and what works and doesn't work you are always very welcome to share that with us in Ulydig Retshjælp so we can also learn from your experiences. Our mail is kontakt@ulydigretshjalp.dk



Police contact

The role of the police contact

The role of the police contact in the Danish context that we know of has been to be the communication link between the police and the activists during an action. So passing forward information to the police that the activists would like them to know for example how long the action is planned to last and passing on information from the police to the activists like if they will let the activists stay for a while or if they threaten to remove them with force.

The police contact role can help deescalating situations just by sharing some info with the police and showing that there's a wish to communicate but also by communicating in a deescalating way, reminding the police about it if the activists are peaceful and not threatening, suggesting that they could use other ways to move activists etc.

The specific purpose of the police contact can differ from action to action for example depending on the size and the purpose of the action. If the action start with a walking demo the main purpose of the police contact could be to do their best to make sure the police will let the demo walk the route that is planned but if the action is happening in the same place all the time the purpose might be to negotiate with the police how long the activists can stay there. It's recommended to have a clear idea about the purpose of the police contact role before an action.

Communication with the activists

During the action you can communicate with the activists in different ways. It might be nice for you to know beforehand how the activists prefer to communicate and how much they actually wish to communicate. In some actions the activists don't want the police to know anything and then your job might more be to let the activists know what the police are saying. One way to communicate with the activists is to do mic checks or use a megaphone. Be aware that the police will then also hear what you communicate to the activists. Another way of communicating with the activists is to spread the information in smaller groups and tell the activists to pass it on.



Communication with legal observers

If there's also legal observers at the action the police contact can collaborate and communicate with them. They are there to document the way the police respond to the action and they might notice police behavior that they can make you aware of or you might notice something that should be documented so it's good to know who each other are and if it's a bigger action it might be nice to have burner phones or walkie talkies to communicate between you with. But remember to use burner phones and don't bring your own phone to the action in case you get arrested since the police may search it.

Communication with back office

If there is a back office for the action it can be a good idea to have a burner phone to communicate with them so they have the relevant information about what's going on especially in case activists are arrested it's good for them to know how many and which police station they are taken to. Sometimes if you ask the police they will let you know where they are bringing the arrested activists.

Communication with the police

When the police arrive at the action you should approach them and let them know that you are the police contact and that they can reach out to you if they have questions or would like to communicate something to the activists. It might be a good idea to give the police some information to make them want to communicate with them for example the activists would like the police to know how long they plan to stay you can tell them that. It's important that you don't give the police any information about specific activists. You should not tell them anything about other people unless those people have given their consent to it. Before the action you need to know what kind of information the activists are comfortable with you passing on to the police and what information they don't want passed on to the police. Consider not to get a lot of information about the action that you cannot tell the police anyway since that might make the communication with them easier for you.

Be aware that the police might try to make you say that you are the person responsible for the action.



Don't agree with this. They will probably ask for a 'demo-leader'. To this you can tell them that there's no demo-leader but that you are the police contact. Also talk about how much they are okay with you confronting the police and how strong you stand on your rights. Some people might find this uncomfortable and escalating. Talk it through with the people at the action. Also how much they are okay with you confronting the police and how strong you stand on your rights

How many police contacts?

The amount of police contacts depends on the size and type of action. If it's a bigger action or an action where several things might happen around the same time, it can be good to have more than one police contact. For a small action only happening in one place one police contact with a buddy should be enough. It can be nice though to have someone else to share or discuss things with during the action. This could be another police contact or a buddy having another role.

Police violence

If the police start you use violence against the activists you might consider if trying to communicate with them still makes sense. In some cases you could try to deescalate the situation by communicating with them, telling them if the activists are peaceful or if the activists plan to leave soon anyway. In other cases there isn't much you can do as the police contact. It's also important in these cases that you do what you're comfortable with and don't put yourself in harm's way if you're not okay with that.



Legal observer guide

Introduction to the role and the purpose with it.

The role of the legal observer is to film and note down the things that happen during an action. This has both an effect on the activists as well as on the police, security guards, workers or people around.

For the activists, this can give reassurance, that someone is witnessing what happens to them and makes them feel more safe. The activists will know that if there is something to complain about (like police violence) someone might have it on video.

For the police, security guards, workers or other people just passing by, this can have an deescalating effect. They know, that if they are being violent or in an other way breaking the law, there is witnesses and proof of what happened.

The legal observer should be out of action and should look different from the activists. Normally the legal observers wears a yellow vests that says legal observer on it. Being out of action (trying to look neutral to the situation) also means no singing with the activists.

When to leave the area of the action?

The role is staying out of action, to make sure not getting arrested. If the police tells you to leave, you have to leave. In that way we make sure the activists are never alone in the end. But this rule can be changed according to the action. It depends on the action if you have to be in the same place as the activists or if you can stay a bit further away.

Often the police will tell everyone to leave the area, but they will wait a bit before removing people. So you can most likely stay a little bit or try moving to the side. Depending on how much activism you have done, you can get a feeling on when to leave.



When the police is arresting someone and putting them into the police van, they will often make an area around where you can not be. They will tell you to move away. You should find the distance you are allowed to be at and stay there. No reason to go further or completely leave unless the police tells you to.

What to get on camera

- Time & place
- Interactions between activists, police, security guards etc.
- Police numbers and lack of (or identifying details)
- Number plates of cars relevant to the action
- Police presence and action
- If the police breaks the rights of the activists
- Activists getting arrested

The police is getting more and more violent and we should make sure to document it. It is hard to do anything about it at the demonstration, but remember that your camera can be a part of deescalation, so hopefully the police will be a bit less violent than otherwise.

If you cannot see it on the video, either say it out loud in the video or write it down and write in what video you can see it.

What NOT to note down/film

- Shots where only activists are on the video, cause its not relevant. Especially if the police does not know it happened or who did it.



How many legal observers do you need?

This depends on the action. For a small action where all the activists are at the same place, you can do it with one legal observer.

If there is multiple places the activists are demonstrating, it is nice with a legal observer each place.

For big actions, consider how big the space for the demonstration is and how many people you need.

As a rule of thumb it is nice to have 1 legal observer pr. 50 activists. It is always nice to have minimum 2 and be in teams. The surroundings also have an impact on the amount ex. If a building is blocking the view and so on.

It is always nicer to have too many legal observers than too little.

Ideally the legal observer has a buddy. For small actions, the legal observer can be buddy with the police contact.

For bigger actions, split the legal observers into buddy pairs, where one buddy has a camera and the other one has a note pad and is keeping the overview of where to go when.

Communication/coordination with each other, police contact and back office

For bigger actions, it is nice to have a system on how to communicate with each other, the police contact and back office.

Before the action, check in with the police contact and back office, to know exactly what kind of information they will need from you. Back office maybe wants to know how many people are arrested. But make sure you know how to communicate that. For example the back office might only want one contact person to tell them stuff.

Communicating with the other legal observers is important at big actions or where you can not see the whole demonstration, because of the building, police lines etc.. Then you should communicate with the other legal observers to make sure you are spread evenly between places.



If needed, find burner phones or walkie talkies to communicate.

Filming and phone security

Do not bring your own phone or a camera/phone you are afraid of getting confiscated.

Only use burner phones or cameras dedicated to activism. Ulydig Retshjælp has two go-pros you can borrow for this purpose.

Your phone/camera can get confiscated by the police and it can take years getting it back. Therefore make sure you are not filming the activist doing something, the police does not know about.

Safety and security for the legal observer

Being around an action means that you are never 100 % safe. There is always a change of getting arrested/charged or having your phone/camera confiscated.

So far in Denmark the legal observers rarely experience violence from the police. But if there is pepper spray or teargas everyone gets hit, including legal observers.

So consider bringing protection like face masks, goggles and water.

In France the legal observers also have helmets (in case the activists starts throwing stuff). They are also not wearing backpacks, since a granate can get stuck between the backpack and your back.

Power of attorneys

At every action you need someone responsible for the activists filling out the power of attorneys. It can be the legal observers, but it can also be someone else.

Who ever is responsible for the power of attorneys need a proper introduction. If they have never filled out the power of attorney, they need an extra intro. Make sure they know when to use them and when not to use them. You are always welcome to reach out to Ulydig Retshjælp about this and we can guide you.



What happens with the material after the action?

As a legal observer you need to know what happens with the video/notes after the action. If you have borrowed the go-pro from Ulydig Retshjælp, then Ulydig Retshjælp will store the video and look through it if needed.

The activists need to know how to get the video, in case they want to complaint about the police or if they have to go to court for the action.