

School funding protests spread in France

Students cite shortages, overcrowded classrooms

Layli Foroudi
REUTERS

AUBERVILLIERS, France – Maisa, a 17-year-old in a poor Paris suburb who aspires to be an English teacher, joined tens of thousands of other students and their supporters last week in protests that spread across France over dilapidated schools, classroom overcrowding and teacher shortages.

At Lycee Le Corbusier school in Aubervilliers, a suburb north of Paris in the Seine-Saint-Denis department, protesters said schools in poor neighborhoods like theirs faced the worst conditions.

“Last year I took the high school French exam without a French teacher, and teachers have a huge impact,” Maisa said. “These are not conditions to study in.”

As protests raged at more than 1,200 French high schools this week, police responded with tear gas and rubber bullets in some cases. More than 5,000 people were arrested, and some protesters were seriously hurt with eye injuries, broken teeth and blows to the head. Interior Minister Laurent Nunez called it a “climate of unacceptable violence” and called for order.

Amelia, 15, joined Maisa in the crowd outside the school gates and held a sign reading, “Our address should not decide our future.” She said she was demonstrating to demand the same rights as students elsewhere in the country.

“The education authority is not investing enough in the suburbs,” she said. “It’s classist and racist.”

Ulysse Rabate, a political scientist at Paris 8 University, said the protests show the way that France’s marginalized urban neighborhoods are increasingly influencing national politics.

“When there is a collapse of the public service, of public education, those who feel it the most, and the most violently, are those at

The nationwide demonstrations and blockades have become a political flash-point at a sensitive moment for the government, which announced a series of deeply unpopular spending cuts in its



French high school students block access to the Lycee Paul Eluard high school in Saint-Denis, near Paris, on Sept. 30 as they protest to demand the hiring of substitute teachers, increased resources and better learning conditions.

ABDUL SABOOR/REUTERS FILE

2027 budget on Oct. 1.

The education budget is set to increase by a below-inflation 1.7% to nearly \$74 billion, excluding teacher pensions.

The education ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Education Minister Edouard GEFRAY said that education remained a priority and the below-inflation budget increase was due to population decline.

The protests started in the Parisian suburbs, where poverty levels are high, then spread to Paris itself and other French towns, including Marseille, Strasbourg, Tours and Lille.

At Lycee Le Corbusier, classes including math, humanities, English and sports have been canceled since the start of the academic year due to a teacher shortage, according to Karima Kara Ali, an elected parent representative.

In Seine-Saint-Denis, two-thirds of high schools took part in protests on Oct. 1, the CGT labor union said. Youth, teachers and parents in four towns complained of unsanitary school conditions and chronic staff shortages including of



Masked protesters stand in a street amid clashes during a protest by high school students at the Lycee Berthelot high school near Paris on Oct. 2.

SARAH MEYSSONNIER/REUTERS FILE

nurses and social workers.

Louise Paternoster, a representative for the Seine-Saint-Denis branch of the CGT’s education union, said the area does not get adequate resources for its student population and their educational needs.

Two-thirds of schools in the department have unfilled teacher positions,

according to a union survey.

Not enough teachers

“Our students are losing out on study time. Some schools don’t have drinking water. We are not equal to other departments,” she said, blaming shortages on government cuts of 3,256 teacher positions nationwide in 2026.

In Pantin, a town on the northeastern edge of Paris, teacher Dilan Roche joined her students as they protested outside their school last week to support their demands and protect them from the police.

“What they wrote on banners, we wrote in a letter to the local education authority: overcrowded classes, no nurses, no social workers – which is problematic for students with learning difficulties, many living in precarity,” she said.

While France ranks in the middle of OECD countries for spending on education, the average expenditure per secondary school student has remained little changed over the last decade, standing at \$13,130 in 2024 and \$13,411.85 in 2010, according to education ministry data.

The last nationwide high school protest movement on this scale demanding more funding came in the 1990s. That followed the government sharply expanding access to the baccalaureat, the school-leaving exam that typically paves the way to universities, without providing schools with sufficient additional resources, said professor Clemence Cardon-Quint at Paul Valery University, who researches education funding.

The movement won an increase in funding, but spending per student later stagnated despite growing demands on schools.

Cardon-Quint said students and teachers have taken on additional responsibilities over the years, including navigating Parcoursup, the university admissions system introduced in 2018 and criticized by some students and teachers as opaque and discriminatory.

“In a period of budgetary restraint, it is more difficult to reduce inequalities,” Cardon-Quint said.

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“The motion defines Zionism quite clearly,” said Mothin Ali, left, a joint deputy leader of the Green Party with Rachel Millward. CARLOS JASSO/REUTERS FILE

Jewish groups condemn classification of Zionism

David Milliken
REUTERS

LONDON – Britain’s Green Party voted on Oct. 4 to classify Zionism as a form of racism, drawing criticism from British Jews and from the Israeli government, which said it now viewed the party as “a body that gives legitimacy to terrorism.”

The party – which received 6% of the vote in national elections in 2024 – said it regarded Zionism as “an ethnonationalist political project” and repeated its call for Britain’s Labour government to end all arms trade with Israel.

“The motion also restates the Green Party’s backing for the right to self-determination and calls for the establishment of a single democratic state throughout historic Palestine,” the party said in a statement.

The definition of Zionism, which inspired the establishment of the state of Israel in the 20th century, and what it implies for the rights of non-Jews in Israel and neighboring territory, is contentious. Jewish groups sometimes define it as a right to Jewish self-determination.

The Green Party motion passed by a majority of 1,022 to 813 despite opposition from many senior figures.

The result was condemned by British Jewish groups.

“The Green Party has made anti-

semitism party policy and become a racist party,” the Movement for Progressive Judaism said, adding that the support of some Jews for the motion did not mean it would not be used to discriminate against others.

Mothin Ali, deputy leader of the Green Party and a supporter of the motion, told Sky News on Oct. 3 that the heavy Palestinian death toll in Israel’s conflict with Hamas – which followed the Palestinian militant group’s deadly 2023 attack on an Israeli music festival – was the key context for the vote.

“The motion defines Zionism quite clearly. It defines it as an ethnonationalist movement. It defines it as ethnic cleansing. It defines it as genocide,” Ali said.

Britain’s government views Israeli settlers’ actions in the West Bank as amounting to ethnic cleansing but has said courts must decide if other Israeli actions qualify as genocide.

Israel – which rejects claims of ethnic cleansing and genocide – called on Oct. 4 for other British political parties to condemn the Green Party vote.

Party leader Zack Polanski and other senior Green Party figures said they would “continue to call out the heinous crimes of [Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s] government” and that “there is no conflict between supporting the rights of Palestinians and the rights of Jewish people.”