

19135 *Teenagers Emerge as a Force in Climate Protests Across Europe*

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/31/world/europe/climate-change-protests-students.html>

Tens of thousands of children skipped school in Belgium on Thursday to join demonstrations for action against climate change, part of a broader environmental protest movement across Europe that has gathered force over the past several weeks.

In Germany, students have protested on Fridays, communicating mainly through the messaging app WhatsApp; in Belgium, they organize on Facebook and have skipped school by the thousands on four consecutive Thursdays.

Last Sunday, climate protests in Brussels swelled to an estimated 100,000 people of all ages.

The climate movement has no obvious leaders or structure, but a 16-year-old Swede, Greta Thunberg, has drawn worldwide attention and inspired many of the protesters. She has called for school strikes to raise awareness of global warming.

Most older people do not feel the urgency young people do about global warming, said Axelle Kiambi, 17, who joined a demonstration in Brussels on Thursday with her sisters, Pauline, 16, and Elisa, 19.

“To us, it is so self-evident that we can’t keep on going in this direction,” said Axelle, raising her voice above the drumming, whistling and shouting of her fellow protesters.

“We come here with the right intentions, to protest in peace and to raise awareness about climate change, because we want to be on the right side of history,” Elisa Kiambi said. “It is time for the government to act.”

After meeting this week with a delegation of climate activists, Belgium’s prime minister, Charles Michel, said he was prepared to act, but not at any cost. “Nothing is for free, someone always has to pay the bills,” he said.

He seemed to refer to the Yellow Vest movement against economic woes and inequality, which has resonated with people across Europe, including in Belgium. That movement, which began in reaction to a planned fuel tax increase — presented as an environmental measure — has been at odds with concerns about the climate.

“We need a climate policy that is positive for the environment, but also one that is positive for the purchasing power of the families,” Mr. Michel said.

In Brussels, Liam, 18, who was protesting for the third Thursday in a row, said there was “a growing momentum” in the movement, but he wondered if it should be more disruptive to draw more attention.

“Most adults probably think it’s cute that children protest,” he said. “But maybe we should change the timing of the protests to rush hour.”