

**B8 EAPN and Les Gilets Jaunes**

**What / Who are Les Gilets Jaunes / Yellow Vests?**

The Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vest) movement has been mobilising over the last month – originally in France, in response to the proposed rise in fuel tax, and now in Belgium, Netherlands, and apparently Serbia as well. In France at least, it is a movement largely made of people with modest revenues, though not necessarily the most vulnerable. Again in France, 64% of the movement feels that unions have no place in this movement, and over 80% reject the engagement of any political party. Over 30% see themselves as ‘neither left nor right’, over 50% identify as left / extreme left, 18% as right / extreme right.

**What is it all about?**

For ‘Le Monde’ it is a revolt against an economic system, against a perceived unjust system of redistribution of wealth, against inequality...

For EAPN France, it is both a reflection of a general rejection of the political class which has been brewing for decades, inequality, the purchasing power of ordinary people (i.e stagnating wages vs rising costs) and general poverty in France, where 9 million people live below the poverty line.

**What they want?**

Not so clear in any of the countries. See an ok overview of demands [here](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_vests_movement) in English and a good one [here](https://www.lelibrepenseur.org/la-charte-officielle-des-25-revendications-des-gilets-jaunes/) in French. (Not clear to what extent these really represent the whole of the movement as it is very disparate).

**Useful background**

4 minute NY times video [here](https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/europe/100000006250440/yellow-vest-protest-france-gilets-jaunes.html?playlistId=100000005927940)

**Why is this relevant for EAPN?**

1. It is movement consisting of a large number of people with modest revenues, people struggling with poverty
2. EAPN sees itself as nurturing a strong, anti-poverty movement throughout Europe
3. EAPN sees itself as being a network of and for people experiencing poverty – this is a concrete opportunity for us to put this into action
4. EAPN would be a natural network to take a position on this – especially as there is plenty of political space at the European level here, with very few civil society organisations haven spoken publicly about this.
5. Engaging could help EAPN impact the public and political narratives around poverty
6. Media interest at the moment makes it easier for EAPN to secure coverage in mainstream media**.**
7. **The violence committed during the protests may be a way for us to focus on the violence of the system,** which is clearly one of the causes of the violence against the system.

**Risks**

1. This is certainly not a pan European movement. It is largely French, and actions have spread to a small number of other countries.
2. Some demands are quite clearly against EAPN values and positions (Immigration, Frexit…)
3. Unclear whether members will take a position (France Netherlands Belgium and Serbia have been asked, only France has responded to date)
4. Engagement of the far right
5. By not engaging do we risk appearing irrelevant?

**Elements of a potential EAPN position** (or a position from those networks concerned, or an article on our website / facebook / twitter from Richard / Leo)

1. EAPN is a network of and for people experiencing poverty. It is our responsibility to speak out
2. Recognise the legitimate anger of people at the financial and political systems
3. Condemn the violence, but link it towards the violence of the system, and condemn violence of police towards the demonstrators
4. Highlight that poverty is a political choice, that political choices made in France and elsewhere have led us to this situation, and that we see parallels in many other countries (UK, Italy, Belgium, Germany etc)
5. Trickle down economic approach and Europe and member states is failing European citizens and is leading to widespread anger, protests and even riots.
6. What leaders can do? (EAPN key messages on tackling poverty and inequality)
7. Distance ourselves from immigration and Frexit demands
8. Highlight EAPN’s role as a network for people experiencing poverty, invite people and organisations to work with us to strengthen the anti-poverty movement throughout Europe.