

Under extreme heat, Turkey continues to struggle with wildfires

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Since June, the whole of Europe, including Turkey, has been hit by scorching temperatures. Spain, Britain and Portugal, among many other countries, have experienced record-high average and daily temperatures.

The extreme heat has disrupted daily life and caused deaths, and has also caused wildfires in many countries. In Turkey, many fires are still not fully under control and further fire risks are present.

On Tuesday morning, Agriculture and Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli announced that 342 serious fires had broken out across Turkey since Friday, June 27.

“The fires in Seferihisar and Menderes in Izmir, Akhisar, Kula and Saruhanli in Manisa have been completely extinguished. In addition, the fires in Hatay Antakya and Manisa Ahmetli are under control and efforts to cool the area are ongoing.” The minister also said that, according to meteorological data, there is a very high risk of fire over the next week.

The impact of the flames on daily life has been intensified because the forest areas where the fires broke out are intertwined with residential areas. On June 30, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that over 50,000 people had been evacuated temporarily from wildfires in Izmir, Bilecik and Hatay. Health Minister Kemal Memisoglu announced that 46 people affected by the fires were receiving treatment, with one of them in a serious condition. The fires also killed countless livestock and wild animals.

On July 1, Minister of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change Murat Kurum announced that 114 buildings, including 110 residences, had been severely damaged in the Bornova, Gaziemir and Seferihisar districts of Izmir alone.

While fires broke out in many parts of the country,

the Aegean region and its most populous city, Izmir (population 4.5 million), were hit hardest. The Ministry of the Interior declared Seferihisar district in Izmir a “disaster area affecting general life.”

On Tuesday, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality announced that over the past three days it had responded to 300 fires, including 15 in forest areas. Ten neighbourhoods in the Seferihisar district and three in the Menderes district were affected. “Around 10,000 hectares (an area the size of 14,000 football pitches) have been reduced to ashes,” the municipality said, citing satellite images.

These figures do not include the fires that broke out on Wednesday in the Cesme and Urla districts of Izmir. Three neighbourhoods have been evacuated due to these ongoing fires.

The Akhisar, Kula and Ahmetli districts of Manisa, neighboring Izmir, were affected by the fires, and dozens of neighborhoods in Akhisar were evacuated. In Bilecik, located in the Marmara Region, many districts have been affected by fires in the last week. Dozens of villages have been evacuated and the Kasikci neighbourhood was burned to ashes.

Hatay, devastated by the 2023 earthquake, was one of the cities that suffered significant fire damage. On June 30, fires broke out in different neighbourhoods, and strong winds prevented the use of firefighting aircraft sent to the region. The fires, which spread through residential areas and forest areas, forced the evacuation of 1,500 people and reportedly damaged four buildings heavily.

Fires also broke out in neighbouring Greece. With temperatures reaching 40°C for several days, wildfires engulfed many coastal towns near Athens, destroying homes and forcing people to evacuate.

On Wednesday, thousands of people were evacuated

in the island of Crete as a massive forest fire raged out of control. The fast-spreading flames threatened homes, tourist accommodations and critical infrastructure, including a fuel station.

Although high temperatures and strong winds directly impact the initiation and spread of fires, these annual disasters are not primarily the result of natural phenomena.

Wildfires are a direct product of climate change, aggravated by a capitalist system in which profit comes before human life, and the social costs are becoming increasingly severe with each passing year. Disasters such as fires, floods, droughts and storms are increasing in both frequency and devastating effect. Governments around the world have largely abandoned the fight against global warming and the climate crisis.

This is accompanied by increasing cuts to social funding for disaster response. Forestry workers, firefighters, rescue workers and volunteers are putting their health and lives at risk by fighting the flames. However, inadequate staffing and infrastructure, resulting from decades of underfunding and cuts, are hindering an effective and rapid response to the fires.

In a statement to *Evrensel*, Birol Gok, president of the Agriculture and Forestry Workers Trade Union, drew attention to the harsh working conditions of forest workers. He stated that even when there is no fire, forest workers stay in the forest for a week and can only go home for a day. He added, “There is a lack of personnel; the number of permanent employees is insufficient. This reduces the number of people working in the field, which is important for fire response. A double shift system is needed to ensure humane working conditions and an effective fire response.”

“At least 16,000 workers need to be recruited for this system ... but the Ministry of Treasury has not approved this,” said Gok, stressing that this leads to accidents at work and an inadequate response to fires.

Although Minister Yumakli praised forestry workers as “Heroes of the Forest” to the media, the government is condemning 600,000 public sector workers, including forestry workers, to misery by offering them a 17 percent pay rise for the first six months of 2025, which is below the rate of inflation.

Turkey, which is plagued by major forest fires every year, suffers from a serious shortage of firefighting

vehicles. The General Directorate of Forestry has only 9 helicopters, 10 aeroplanes and 10 UAVs. Although aircraft are rented in the summer months to address the shortage, the simultaneous outbreak of multiple fires results in inadequate interventions and the burning of large areas.

Wildfires are a global problem that requires a global solution. But as with other critical global issues, capitalist governments are incapable of providing an international solution. Despite the development of a global economy, the division of the world into rival nation states stands in the way.

Today, southern Europe, including Turkey, is grappling with preventable fires. Earlier this year, meanwhile, Los Angeles, a major US city, was hit by devastating fires. On Inauguration Day, President Donald Trump vowed to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Agreement. The White House then declared a “national energy emergency,” outlining a series of changes that would reverse US climate regulations and increase oil and gas production.

Meanwhile, NATO member states, including Turkey, last week agreed to increase their armaments spending to 5 percent of GDP at Trump’s request. The increased diversion of funds to militarism and war means cutting social spending, including struggling with disasters, and shelving all remaining climate programs.

Whatever the capacities of individual nation states, the fight against fires and other ecological catastrophes arising from a global problem cannot be coordinated on a national scale or solved on a national basis. All over the world, the ruling classes have made it clear that they are incapable of organizing an international response to these critical problems and, moreover, that they are opposed to it. The only social force capable of implementing the urgent global intervention that is needed is the international working class. This requires taking power in every country and reorganizing the global economy on a socialist basis, that is, on the basis of human needs rather than private profit.



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