

Wildfires hit France, Spain and entire Mediterranean rim of Europe

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On August 10, southern France's Aude prefecture announced that firefighters had brought the fire under control that had been devastating that department for almost a week. However, anger is rising across the south of France and throughout Europe, which has been hit by fires linked to global warming.

While European nations boost their military budgets by hundreds of billions of euros to wage war on Russia, public authorities refuse to allocate the necessary resources to fight fires, much less address the global climate crisis.

In Aude, a woman died in her home, 25 people were injured, including 20 firefighters. The material toll of the fire in Aude reports 36 homes destroyed, 20 others damaged, and 62 vehicles destroyed. This fire, by ravaging 16,000 hectares of forest, agricultural areas and homes, became the largest fire of the century in France, exceeding the level of that of 1949.

Electricity access has reportedly been restored across the department, but phone networks and drinking water remain problematic. Authorities have advised residents of Durban, Coustouge, Villesèque-des-Corbières, Thézan, Jonquières, Quintillan, Villeneuve-les-Corbières, and Fontjoncouse not to consume tap water.

As the heatwave persists, around a thousand firefighters, reinforced by 58 soldiers, are working to prevent new fires. According to the prefecture, their mission is “to tackle hot spots in support of the fire services and civil security.”

Driven by these extreme conditions, wildfires are raging around the entire Mediterranean rim of Europe, hitting in particular the Iberian peninsula. In Spain in just a few days a hundred thousand hectares — mainly in Castilla y León and Galicia — have burned. Two firefighter volunteers have died. At least 11 major roads have been affected, and train service between Madrid

and Galicia has been suspended.

More than 5,000 residents were evacuated due to the fires in Zamora and Cáceres. Particular concern centres on the one in Jarilla (Cáceres), where 700 residents have been evacuated. The situation is also difficult in Galicia, especially in Ourense, with several blazes that have burned up to 20,000 hectares and forced the suspension of rail services.

These disasters take place after over a decade of deep cuts to forest management budgets. Public forestry investment in Spain peaked in 2009 at €1.7 billion. By 2022, this had fallen 26 percent to €1.295 billion. Within this total, the sharpest reduction has been in fire prevention, cut by more than half. Experts have directly linked this collapse in prevention spending to the proliferation of the fires now devastating Spain.

In Portugal, thousands of firefighters have been deployed to combat fires that have been ongoing for several weeks. Wildfires are particularly intense in the town of Arganil, where more than 900 firefighters face a “very unfavourable” situation, authorities said Thursday. At least three other fires are burning in Sátão, Cinfães and Trancoso.

In Greece, a large forest fire broke out in Keratea, south of Athens, and devastated the Attica region, killing at least one person. Greek authorities issued evacuation orders, while at least 260 firefighters supported by many civilian volunteers were fighting the fire.

In Albania, where nearly 34,000 hectares have burned since July, the state deployed about 800 soldiers to assist firefighters against 14 active fronts. Seven helicopters and water-bombers from the UAE, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, and Greece took part, according to the Albanian Ministry of Defense.

Wildfires also ignited in Turkey's Çanakkale and

Bayramiç regions, where authorities had to relocate 654 residents in total.

These fires sweeping southern Europe are not merely local issues that can be solved nationally; they stem from the capitalist nation-state system's failure to confront the global climate crisis. This crisis is undeniably the catalyst behind the international wave of fires and heatwaves engulfing Europe.

Richard Allan, a professor at the University of Reading, told FranceInfo that the heatwave now "extending to the United Kingdom is astonishingly severe by historical standards. Yet longer, more intense, and more frequent heatwaves are a predictable consequence of rising greenhouse-gas concentrations in the atmosphere, driven primarily by our use of fossil fuels."

Benoît Reymond, national expert at the Forest Fire Defense Division of France's National Forestry Office, explained that these conditions created the unprecedented fire in Aude: "In the first seven or eight hours, it covered 10,000 hectares. That's almost twice the size of the 2021 Gonfaron fire, which was already extraordinary. We can't yet give an exact speed, but it likely exceeded 5 km/h on average."

"These are clearly direct consequences of climate change we've anticipated for years," he continued. The warming and resulting desiccation are fatal to vegetation, forcing trees into climatic stresses they've never experienced in their lifetimes. Under such bone-dry conditions, fires ignite with ease.

Already, during the 2021 fires, Professor Levent Kurmaz of Bogazici University in Istanbul told *The Independent*: "All around the Mediterranean we will have a desert climate by the end of the century. ... The climate in southern Turkey, as in Greece and Italy, will be similar to that of Cairo or Basra in southern Iraq."

According to current Météo-France (the official French meteorological administration) projections, a 2.7 °C rise in global temperatures would double the number of high-fire-risk days in France. By 2100, with a 4 °C increase in some scenarios, "all of France will face high fire risk: the northern half at levels now seen on the Mediterranean rim, and the south at twice today's risk," the agency reports.

This disaster is not inevitable, but it is the outcome toward which the world's capitalist powers are hurtling. Driven by their reactionary national interests,

they cannot carry out the economic coordination and planning necessary for a global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Having squandered hundreds of billions of euros on their war with Russia in Ukraine, NATO countries are now imposing massive austerity, taking workers' money to militarize society, not solve the climate crisis.

The ecological irrationality of imperialism is underscored by the fact that Europe and the United States are cutting off trade with emerging countries such as China, which concentrate a large share of the world's production of zero-emission energy infrastructure.

Anger is mounting among workers against the catastrophic management of resources by the ruling class. After a fire hit the Estaque district in the north of Marseille and ravaged 750 hectares, a group of residents has filed a complaint to denounce the abandonment of the inhabitants by the public authorities and criticize the official handling of the crisis.

One of them, Adrien, denounced the lack of preparation of the emergency services and the lack of evacuation organized by the public authorities: "My wife called me, panicked. There was a firefighters' 4x4 without any hose or anything. And the flames five meters away. With a baby in our arms, inevitably, we ran away. ... We received a lockdown text message. But when the fire is spreading to your garden, you run."

Her neighbour, Dominique, said: "I was scared. There was no one there. No alert, no helicopter. Fire, I know. What traumatized me was the silence. ... Filing a complaint is trying to heal, you want to understand, to get answers."

A response to the ecological crisis requires the building of an international movement among workers to remove power from the ailing capitalist oligarchy, and to bring the world's technological and industrial resources under the democratic control of working people in order to meet the basic social needs of humanity.



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