

# Wildfires fueled by climate change devastate Spain

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Massive wildfires have burned in Spanish forests throughout August, devastating multiple regions. In the past two weeks, they erupted in Galicia, Castilla y León, Extremadura, Madrid, Asturias, Cantabria, Andalusia, and Valencia. More than 350,000 hectares have already burned across Spain, an area equivalent to 34 times the size of the city of Barcelona or to the entire island of Mallorca, making this the worst year since records began.

The fire that started on August 10 in Molezuelas de la Carballeda (Castilla y León) has already become the largest in Spain's history, killing two and burning over 50,000 hectares. In Galicia, the Chandrexa de Queixa fire is the largest in the region's history, which has historically seen its forests burn intensely.

So far, four people have died, dozens have been injured—ten seriously—and more than 30,000 have been evacuated. Many villages have been destroyed, with families losing their homes and belongings. Dozens of roads have been closed, and the rail connection between Madrid and Galicia has been suspended due to fire.

The archaeological complex of the Roman gold mines of Las Médulas, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was devastated by the flames. According to experts, the thermal shock and loss of protective vegetation could endanger centuries of Roman engineering. The Picos de Europa Natural Park was also affected by the fires.

What is happening in Spain is not an isolated event. In Europe, France is experiencing its worst wildfire season in 75 years, Portugal is on high alert, Cyprus suffered its worst fires in half a century on July 22 and 23, and massive fires are spreading across Greece, Turkey, Albania, and the Balkans. So far this year, Europe's wildfire season has burned 439,568 hectares,

more than twice the average of the past 19 years.

Outside Europe, the US and Canada have also experienced massive wildfires. Canada is enduring its second worst wildfire season in history, with an area burned nearly the size of Panama.

This is a consequence of climate change and capitalism's inability to combat it. Lorenzo Labrador, a scientist at the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), explains that climate change "plays an indirect but key role by increasing the frequency and intensity of heatwaves and prolonging droughts. These conditions raise the risk and likelihood of fire spread." Extreme heat and drought dry out vegetation, turning it into the perfect fuel for wildfires.

The data leave no room for doubt: July 2025 was recorded as the third hottest month in history since reliable climate records exist, only surpassed by July 2023 and 2024. The global average surface temperature, both land and ocean, for 2025 so far (January to July) is 1.18 °C above the 20th-century average. This makes 2025 the warmest year on record to date, surpassing even the record set in 2023.

This gives rise to so-called sixth-generation fires. These fires can generate their own weather, producing winds, lightning, or storms—known as pyrocumulus—due to the extreme heat they emit. This also makes them spread rapidly, making them nearly impossible to extinguish.

A study by the University of Tasmania, published in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, revealed that the frequency and intensity of extreme wildfires have more than doubled over the past two decades.

CO2 emissions generated by wildfires are also the highest since records began 23 years ago. Serbia, Greece, and Albania recorded their highest emissions since 2007, Cyprus reached its highest annual total in

just two days, and the United Kingdom saw its highest emissions in history, largely due to the large wildfires in northern Scotland in late June-early July.

The consequences of climate change are catastrophic, and not only in terms of wildfires. Last October, severe floods in Spain—also a result of climate change—left more than 200 dead. Although scientists had predicted that such floods could occur, the Spanish authorities did nothing to prevent them or prepare emergency plans.

It is known that climate change produces increasingly severe natural disasters, yet no coordinated action is taken to stop it or to allocate the necessary resources to establish infrastructure and disaster response plans capable of mitigating such emergencies.

The rotten governments that run the capitalist system funnel these resources to large banks and corporations via massive bailouts, or they invest them in preparing for war. In 2024, the combined defense spending of EU member states reached €326 billion, 30 percent more than in 2021, representing 1.9 percent of the EU's GDP. Now NATO countries are expanding their military budgets to up to 5 percent of GDP, while Europe's 'Readiness 2030' rearmament plan foresees spending up to €800 billion over four years.

These immense sums will come from savage cuts to social spending, health, education, pensions, but also from efforts to combat climate change. Spain spends €26 billion a year on military expenditure, a figure that will more than triple in the coming years under the aforementioned plans. By comparison, the funds for fighting wildfires are ridiculously low and decreasing: between 2009 and 2025, they fell from €1.742 billion to €1.295 billion. The budget allocated to fire prevention has dropped from €364 million to €175.8 million.

In 2020, Greenpeace reported that 81.52 percent of Spain's forested area has no management plans. Additionally, from 1962 to 2019, 4 million hectares of farmland in Spain were abandoned and have now become forested areas.

Mónica Parrilla, Greenpeace Spain's head of wildfire response, warned back then: "Spain is the second country in the EU in terms of forested area, yet two-thirds of it is at risk of desertification. These are not contradictory messages. The abandonment of farmland and the lack of forest management have resulted in a highly flammable landscape. If we do not manage that landscape, fire will do it in a devastating way." This is

what is happening now.

The lack of funding also affects forest firefighters, who work in grueling conditions. There is a shortage of personnel, salaries are very low, and workloads exhausting. Moreover, many contracts are temporary and last only through the summer. There are no additional pay allowances for exposure to toxic agents or hazardous conditions, nor are there specific occupational risk plans.

A firefighter from Castilla y León, where 80 percent work only in summer under private company contracts, said: "We are in the hands of people who have no idea how to manage a firefighting operation." He added that "Salaries are miserable" for shifts that can reach up to 18 hours a day. Regarding the companies that hire them, he noted, "The jobs are awarded through low-bid contracts, and the company that pays the least gets the contracts for prevention and firefighting work. In the end, the ones who pay the price are the workers, because these companies skimp on everything they can: on salaries and on equipment."

The unions do nothing for these workers, who in many cases have had their salaries and contracts frozen for years. The few strikes that have taken place to date have been isolated in specific regions. Forest firefighters can no longer expect anything from these unions; this is further proof of the need to form rank-and-file committees where workers can break the control of union bureaucracies and organize their struggle not only across Spain but together with colleagues throughout Europe who face conditions similar to their own.

The only wildfire management that capitalism can offer is to wait for cooler weather, for rain, or to let the forests burn until there is nothing left to burn. Society needs to be organized along socialist lines to carry out, in a unified and international way, the fight against climate change and allocate the necessary resources to prevent and extinguish wildfires.



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