

Almost 400,000 flee as heatwave wildfires rip through Europe

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More than 375,000 people have been driven from their homes and holiday accommodation in France and Spain as the wildfires produced by Europe's third heatwave of the summer sweep across a continent enduring what is the worst heatwave season ever recorded.

The figure is climbing inexorably towards 400,000 with the city council of French city Bordeaux considering a "total evacuation if needed".

A heat dome over Europe has driven record temperatures in many countries. At the late-June peak, temperatures ran 14-18°C above normal across much of the continent. The heat has not relented since. As the latest fires took hold a temperature of 48.4 °C was recorded at Casteltermini in Sicily on July 18—the highest recorded temperature in Europe so far during this heatwave. On Thursday temperatures reached 44 °C across southeastern interior Spain and the Guadalquivir Valley.

According to interior minister Laurent Nuñez, France saw what was "probably" the biggest peacetime civilian evacuation it has ever seen. Authorities ordered the total clearance, by land and sea, of the Gironde region of the south west—one of the country's main holiday destinations—and the port city of Bordeaux with a population of over 274,000 began drawing up plans for its own evacuation.

In Spain, a national emergency was declared over wildfires for the first time ever, with more than 90,000 people told to flee. On Saturday evening the interior ministry said a man had been found dead in his car in a ravine near Valencia. Three firefighters have lost their lives; one in Italy and two in France:

By Sunday more than 220,000 people had been evacuated from the path of the main forest fire in southwest France as almost 98,000 hectares burned nationally, a record. The fire that began near Saumos in the Gironde on Wednesday generated its own weather, with Sébastien Berge, head of the Gironde firefighters' union, saying his members were "overwhelmed" by a fire front stretching more than 20km. On Sunday, Nuñez said the fires "remained extremely violent, unpredictable" as they edged towards Bordeaux.

Around 44,000 fled the Cap Ferret peninsula on the Atlantic coast, its only access road threatened by the flames, with boats

ferrying hundreds off the piers. At Biscarrosse to the south, evacuees included a children's summer camp and a care home for the elderly. Jean Mazodier, 86, evacuated from his forest home at dawn, told *Le Monde*: "Everything's burned. It's like losing a child."

By the weekend the fire had turned towards Bordeaux, with evacuation orders issued across a widening span of suburbs along with the city's airport, as around 55,000 people were cleared from villages on the city's approaches overnight. Mayor Thomas Cazenave said the fire was "at the gates of the metropolitan area" and the city council was studying scenarios up to a total evacuation. Sixty-eight firefighters had been injured tackling the fires in the south-west.

More than 1,500 French soldiers and 1,700 additional security personnel have been deployed, with an A400M military transport plane joining water bombers. Sunday's finale of the Tour de France in Paris was shortened after security forces were redeployed.

President Emmanuel Macron activated the European Union's civil protection mechanism, securing aircraft and personnel from Croatia, Portugal, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, with Germany sending helicopters and rescue teams. That the head of state of one of the world's largest economies must appeal across the continent for aircraft in an emergency forecast for months is an admission that no capitalist government across Europe maintains the means to protect its population.

In Spain, the national emergency covering Madrid and the province of Ávila, saw operational command transferred to the military's emergency unit. Such a declaration has been made only once before, during the nationwide blackout of April 2025. Two large fires west of Madrid merged, getting as close as 50km to the Spanish capital, and by Sunday fresh evacuations were ordered near Toledo, with over 30,000 cleared from Ávila and more than 15,000 from Castellón in the east.

Madrid's regional emergency chief, Carlos Novillo, admitted that the fire was "at its peak and currently beyond the capacity of firefighters to contain". Regional president Isabel Díaz Ayuso called it "the worst wildfire in our region's history." *El Mundo* reported some 24,000 hectares burned in the Madrid region and 21,000 in Ávila. Spain, too, requested aircraft through the EU mechanism.

In Italy, more than 40,000 hectares have burned nationally since the start of the year, an 81 percent increase on the recent average. Wildfires had been raging for days across Sicily, where temperatures topped 40C and gusts of hot wind fanned the flames. In midweek, around 6,000 firefighters, forest guards and civil protection officials, with the help of water-bombing aircraft, were deployed to at least 50 fires the regional head Renato Schifani said.

The fires spread this weekend from Sicily to the mainland. On Sunday a large blaze on the Gargano promontory in Puglia reached the coast, with more than a thousand tourists evacuated from beaches by boat. In Sicily, civil protection again raised its highest fire alert for the provinces of Palermo and Trapani.

In Greece, firefighters responded to 50 rural and forest fires across multiple regions in 24 hours. To Vima reported on Thursday that most were brought under control in their initial stages by ground crews and aerial units. The largest operations were at Zoniana, in the regional unit of Rethymno on Crete; Afidnes in Attica; Ano Kerasovo near Agrinio; Kalligata on the island of Kefalonia; Imero Pefko in Pikermi; and Perachora near Loutraki. Attica (containing the capital Athens), Evia and Rhodes were placed under a red-code alert for very high fire risk.

The engulfing of much of southern Europe by forest fires, worse than any before, is the result of world governments' failure to do what is needed to restrict carbon emissions and global heating, compounded by decades of defunded forestry and civil protection.

It is not just in the hotter climates that fires have broken out, but also in the north from the UK to Norway.

Britain, the sixth largest economy in the world, possesses no aerial firefighting capability of any kind. In the Cairngorms National Park in Scotland, a blaze burning since July 15 has required more than 500 firefighters to tackle it. Scottish National Party First Minister John Swinney has asked Andy Burnham's UK Labour "government for military assistance in aerial support... and we await a response."

North Wales and the Upper Severn are the first parts of Britain to declare a drought, having received just 3 percent of its average July rainfall, with a fourth heatwave forecast for the coming week. An analysis published this week by the World Weather Attribution consortium found the evaporative conditions drying out the continent were made 80 times more likely by global heating in western Europe and 40 times more likely in the east.

On Friday, World Health Organization Europe head Hans Henri P. Kluge warned, "As climate change drives a warming world, we need to prepare for more frequent and intense wildfires." Since 2022, the number of wildfires has risen by 57 percent across the WHO European Region. Portugal and Spain have suffered a 100 percent increase in wildfires this year compared with 2025.

According to the European Forest Fire Information System

(EFFIS), last year alone, around 2.2 million hectares burned, while 254,388 hectares had already been destroyed by July 22 this year. In the days since, the destruction has significantly worsened.

France, with Paris playing a central role, is the most visited country in the world receiving more than 100 million annual foreign visitors. The response of the French state to the ongoing social catastrophe was that nothing should impact the bottom line, with Foreign Office junior minister Éléonore Caroit telling the BBC Saturday that tourists should not cancel their holidays. "I'm in Paris and nothing is happening [!], and most other regions are OK," she said.

This was *less than two weeks* after fire had torn through some 2,000 hectares of the Fontainebleau forest just south-east of Paris, forcing the evacuation of 1,000 people and compelling water-bombers to scoop from the Seine to protect the capital region for the first time in its history.

As the WSWS reported on July 14, EuroMOMO had by then attributed roughly 10,600 deaths to this summer's heat, with an analysis by *Politico* identifying 14,000 excess deaths in six countries—Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK—during the June heatwave alone. This excluded deaths in other heavily impacted countries such as Italy, Portugal and Greece.

The World Health Organisation estimates extreme heat has killed some 200,000 people in Europe in four years, deaths it said were for the most part "entirely preventable."

They are not prevented because society's resources, controlled by the super-rich capitalist class and governments which serve their interests, have been allocated elsewhere. The same governments now appealing to one another for water bombers against the flames are pouring hundreds of billions into rearmament. Six of Europe's leading oil companies made \$21.7 billion in profits in the first quarter of this year, 43 percent up on 2025.



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