

Thousands evacuated as wildfires sweep across western Europe

People ordered to leave homes in France and on Costa del Sol while Portugal says heatwave has killed 238 so far



Wildfire near Landiras, southwestern France, on Saturday. Strong winds and hot, dry weather are frustrating firefighters' efforts to contain a big wildfire in pine forests near Bordeaux. Photograph: AP

Shanti Das, Mark Townsend and agencies

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Huge wildfires swept across western Europe on Saturday, destroying swathes of land and forcing thousands from their homes amid a **record-breaking heatwave** that shows no signs of easing.

Firefighters were battling to bring blazes under control in parts of **France, Spain and Portugal**, with blistering summer temperatures that have allowed them to flourish expected to continue this week.

In the region of Gironde in south-western **France**, more than 12,000 people were evacuated as strong winds frustrated efforts to contain a fire that raced across pine forests.

That fire and another just south of Bordeaux have ravaged nearly 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of land, up from 7,300 on Friday.

“We have a fire that will continue to spread as long as it is not stabilised,” said Vincent Ferrier, deputy prefect for Langon in Gironde.

One resident living near La Teste-de-Buch in Gironde described the conditions as “post-apocalyptic”.

“I’ve never seen this before,” she told news agency AFP.

In neighbouring **Spain**, firefighters were battling a series of fires after days of unusually high temperatures which reached up to 45.7C.



A Ryanair plane flies over a forest fire on the Mijas mountain range in Spain on Saturday, where more than 3,000 people were evacuated. Photograph: Alvaro Cabrera/EPA

In the south of the country, near the Costa del Sol, more than 3,000 people were evacuated from their homes due to a large wildfire near the town of Mijas. Many were taken to shelter in a sports centre, emergency services said.

“The police drove up and down the road with their sirens on and everyone was told to leave. Just leave. No instructions where to go,” British pensioner John Pretty, 83, said.

Ashley Baker, a Briton who lives in Mijas, told the BBC: “There are about 40 houses in our area. Everyone was really nervous and standing outside or on balconies watching it.”

Holidaymakers on the beach in Torremolinos described soaring plumes of smoke rising in the hills, where several aircraft were tackling the blaze.

Some of the worst fires have been in **Portugal**, where the pilot of an aerial fire-fighting plane died on Friday when his plane crashed while on an operation in the Foz Côa area, near the Spanish border.

It was the first fatality from wildfires in Portugal so far this year, which have injured more than 160 people this week and forced hundreds to be evacuated.

Portugal’s health ministry said 238 people had died as a result of the heatwave between 7 and 13 July, most of them elderly people with underlying conditions.



A firefighter helicopter flies over a wildfire near Bustelo village in Amarante, in the north of Portugal, on Saturday. Photograph: Patrícia de Melo Moreira/AFP/Getty Images

There was some respite on Saturday for firefighters in Portugal, where temperatures dropped slightly across most of the country after reaching about 40C in recent days.

“We have had big fires and we don’t want them to be reactivated again ... We will keep extreme vigilance this weekend,” emergency and civil protection authority commander Andre Fernandes told reporters.

Fire season has hit parts of **Europe** earlier than usual this year after an unusually dry, hot spring that left the soil parched.

The fires have been fanned by extreme temperatures which experts attribute to climate change. Croatia and Hungary have also fought wildfires this week, as have California and Morocco.

In Portugal a total of 39,550 hectares (98,000 acres) was ravaged by wildfires from the start of the year until mid-June, more than triple the area in the same period last year, data from the Institute for the Conservation of Nature and Forests showed.

An area equivalent to almost two-thirds of that has burned during fires in the last week.

EU countries rush to help France tackle ‘monstrous’ wildfires Firefighters from Romania, Poland, Austria, Greece and Italy fight blazes in show of ‘European solidarity’



A wildfire near Belin-Beliet, south-west France. Photograph: Thibaud Moritz/AFP/Getty Images

Angelique Chrisafis in Paris

[@achrisafis](#)

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Hundreds of firefighters from across the EU have been rushed to **France** to help battle wildfires in an unprecedented show of international solidarity.

Most are stationed along a 26 mile (40km) active fire-front in the south-west, where a blaze described as “monstrous” continued to devastate pine forests.

German firefighters and their vehicles arrived in the early hours of Friday morning to help tackle the massive Landiras fire in the Gironde and the Landes, south of Bordeaux, which had **sparked up again** this week after destroying swathes of forest in July.



The ruins of a house destroyed by fire in Belin-Beliet, south-west France. Photograph:

Guillaume Souvant/AFP/Getty Images

Romanian firefighters and teams from Poland, Austria, Greece and Italy were also deployed to help more than 1,100 French firefighters try to contain the blaze. President Emmanuel Macron tweeted of the more than 360 firefighters arriving with vehicles and planes: “Our partners are coming to France’s aid against the fires. Thank you to them. European solidarity is at work!”

In a summer of extreme heat and drought, France has faced its **most serious forest fires** in years. One local firefighter described the Landiras blaze in south-west France as “a sleeping monster which can wake at any gust of wind”.

The French state broadcaster reported that since the start of the year, 56,000 hectares of forest had burned in France – three times the annual average this decade. There have also been forest fires in northern regions not usually hit by summer blazes, including in Brittany, where firefighting planes arrived from Sweden to help.



France's prime minister, Élisabeth Borne (centre), greets firefighters as she visits the site of a wildfire in Hostens, south-west France. Photograph: Philippe Lopez/EPA

Authorities in the Gironde said in a statement that more than 7,400 hectares of forest had burned in the Landiras fire, France's biggest blaze. They said that although the fire had not developed further overnight, high temperatures and dry conditions expected on Friday meant there was a "severe risk" of the fire spreading, and it would be a "complicated" day for fire teams.

The fire had already destroyed 14,000 hectares in July – the driest month in France since 1961 – before being contained, but it had never been fully extinguished and had continued to smoulder in the region's peat-rich soil before erupting again this week in the tinder-dry pine forests.

Since flaring up again on Tuesday, the fire, which officials suspect may have been caused by arson, has burned through 7,400 hectares, destroyed or damaged 17 homes, and forced 10,000 people to flee, Lieut-Col Arnaud Mendousse of the Gironde fire and rescue service told AFP.