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Subject: Record wildfires show need for investments in frontline services



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As Europe reels from one of its most punishing summers on record, the ETUC and EPSU call for public investments in frontline services to be increased, in line with the scale of the climate challenges at hand.

New figures, however, point to a meagre increase in frontline services. While the total area burnt by wildfires increased by 10% between 2023 and 2024, [Eurostat figures](#) released this week show that the share of budgets spent on firefighting services has flatlined, at around 0.5% of government expenditure.

Firefighter numbers remain alarmingly low. Worse yet, some countries have reduced the number of firefighters, including by not replacing firefighters who go on retirement. Belgium reduced its number of firefighters by -10%, while Portugal, Cyprus and Croatia oversaw a drop in staff numbers (-6%, -4% and -3% respectively) in 2024, a year when fire damage dramatically increased (+43%, +79% and +44% of burnt area respectively – see notes).

2025 is proving to be another record-breaking year and the total area burnt this year has already topped the charts of any year on record, with four months left to go. Firefighters have battled more than 1,600 blazes across Europe, with thousands of personnel having been deployed to contain infernos described as the worst in decades.

These events are not isolated anomalies but stark indicators of a climate crisis accelerating in intensity and frequency and they demand a coordinated, well-funded public response. Trade unions are calling for the EU to suspend its economic governance rules to allow national governments to invest in readiness and response to extreme weather events.

Esther Lynch, ETUC General Secretary, said:

“The number of firefighters is woefully low. It is scandalous that some countries continue to reduce firefighter numbers just as wildfires grow in size, threatening people’s lives and livelihoods. At a time when preparedness is a growing focus, too many policy-makers are ignoring the fires that are destroying livelihoods and endangering lives right now.”

Jan Willem Goudriaan, EPSU General Secretary, said:

“As fires and flooding increase due to climate change, we cannot have stagnant budgets. It is now time to substantially increase public investment for forest maintenance, water management, fire services, civil protection, and public services dealing with prevention. This needs to be a core of the Preparedness Strategy of the European Commission. Alas they are silent while the roaring sound of forest fires sweep the EU.”

ENDS

Notes

Data source: firefighter numbers are taken from [Eurostat](#) and area burnt from the EU's [EFFIS statistical portal](#).

The change in firefighter numbers was obtained by comparing Eurostat the figures for firefighters for 2024, release by Eurostat this week (see [here](#)), with the same figures for 2023, released this time last year (see [here](#)). The total number of firefighters employed by country is provided in excel files in the press release (download links for [2023](#) and [2024](#)).

The increase in area burnt is calculated according to [EFFIS methodology](#), as the difference between 2024 and the yearly average for the period 2006-2023.

[Public services](#)

