

## Extreme wildfires in Mediterranean countries provide lessons for climate-impacted Europe

- The climate crisis is fuelling wildfires in Europe, with **high intensity fires arising further North** than ever before.
- FirEUrisk project is studying scenarios to mitigate fire risk across the continent, leveraging valuable **lessons learned in Southern-European** countries.
- The goal is to **share knowledge** with countries that have limited previous experience in managing extreme wildfires, so that all citizens are equally protected.

**Madrid, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2022** – With wildfires raging across Europe, Southern European countries have deployed all their strategies for the prevention and management of fires. As fire regimes spread to Northern latitudes due to climate change and socioeconomic changes, experts from the FirEUrisk project are fostering knowledge transfer between European countries to improve their ability to prevent and react to this increased threat.

“We have to prepare ourselves for fires occurring in regions where they did not occur before, and becoming progressively more severe,” explains FirEUrisk coordinator Dr Domingos Xavier Viegas from the University of Coimbra (Portugal). Leveraging on the experience of Mediterranean countries, “FirEUrisk is developing guidelines, directives and recommendations that can be adopted by central and Northern European countries.”

In Portugal, the burned area at the end of July encompassed 70 thousand hectares, larger than any burned surface registered since 2017. In Spain, this year has been worse than the last 25 years (352 fires and 229 645 ha burned). The current year's events demonstrate that predicted changes, like the reduction of rainfall and the occurrence of repeated and prolonged heat waves, are becoming a ‘new normal’, indicating the emergence of predicted future climate scenarios with increased wildfire risk in Europe.

“Recent forecasts predict that in the near future, fire risk will increase 3-fold, that is, we’ll face two or three times more days of very high to extreme fire risk. We must act to prepare our ecosystem and our society, or we’ll have a very difficult future,” says Dr Viegas.

### Different realities across Europe, becoming one

Across Europe, “there are different realities, particularly in terms of combat preparedness, operational experience, equipment, training, and community preparation,” explains Dr Viegas. Wildfires have not been as common or as severe in central and Northern Europe as they have been in the South. “These countries will soon have a similar organizational



capacity and preparation to Southern territories. They are concerned and dedicated to learning from our experience,” Dr Viegas adds.

Working with predictions for the next 30 to 50 years, FirEUrisk’s goal is for Europe to move faster, and go through the necessary steps to face the changes in fire weather and the increasingly imminent risk of wildfires. “We need to ensure that all of Europe is a safe area where citizens, in the face of extreme fires, do not have to face material or human losses.”

Determined to share the Portuguese model, put in place after the terrible blazes of 2017, Dr Viegas believes “Europe must promote the sharing of resources, commit to a greater development of scientific knowledge and new technologies. We need rational guidelines that people can understand and stick to.” Interventions that, in Portugal, are based on developing cross-cutting local policies through dialogue and shared activities.

## About the FirEUrisk project

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FirEUrisk is a EU-funded project (H2020, grant agreement number 101003890) working to develop a science-based strategy to manage major forest fires in Europe.

Gathering 39 expert partners from all over the world (research institutions, universities and private companies), the project is dissecting risk and how to manage it, developing new tools for assessing fire danger and the vulnerability of communities and landscapes. These strategies will be tested in pilot sites and demonstration areas and implemented to adapt all European countries to changing climate conditions.

## Contact

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Learn more about the project:



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