

Firefighters Cut in 12 EU Countries

Despite Rising Climate Risk

The number of firefighters was cut in a dozen EU member states last year despite a rising risk of fire caused by climate change, an analysis of new EU data by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has found.

Eurostat figures published have shown that there were 362,400 firefighters in the EU in 2023, which was an increase of 3,200 on the previous year. However, a look behind that headline figure reveals a series of cuts to fire services in 12 member states – most of the countries for which Eurostat has published figures.

They include countries which experienced huge wildfires in 2023, such as Greece, Italy and Cyprus. The cuts also coincided with the second hottest year recorded in European history. The number of firefighters was cut for the second year running in Germany, Hungary, Romania and Sweden. The ETUC is calling on the EU and member states not to make the situation worse by returning to austerity.

The European Commission recently announced that it is opening an 'Excessive Deficit Procedure' for 25% of member states, which risks pushing them towards new spending cuts. Instead, the EU should invest in a just transition to a green economy, which would ensure we tackle climate change while creating quality



jobs and properly funding our public services.

Responding to the findings, ETUC General Secretary Esther Lynch said: "Cutting the number of firefighters at a time when the climate crisis is increasing the risk of fires is not what is needed and irresponsible. These cuts put at risk the safety of the public, our environment and the remaining firefighters, who are now expected to tackle more frequent and severe blazes with fewer resources and less rest.

"EU leaders cannot claim to be committed to keeping Europe safe from the increased risk of fires while pushing countries towards austerity measures which leave public services understaffed.

"The climate crisis requires us to increase public investment to properly fund our services and deliver a green economy that creates quality jobs."

EPSU General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan said: "Reducing the number of firefighters at a critical time, when climate change is increasing the number of fires, is putting the workforce at risk.

"Today firefighters are faced with wildfires even during winter, such as in Sweden, and is something that has never been seen before. The exposure to PFAS has significantly increased and yet, despite promises to reinforce the workforce, we are seeing the opposite.

"The recent increase in fires and floods across Europe is not just a natural catastrophe but were caused by humans. Governments are making it impossible for these catastrophes to be contained or stopped by significantly decreasing the workforce, therefore causing both increased exposure to the few firefighters working and increased psychosocial risks."

Table 1: Member states where firefighter numbers were cut between 2022 and 2023

	2022	2023	Actual change	Percentage change
Germany	64,869	61,700	-3,170	-4.8
Estonia	3,020	2,700	-320	-10.6
Greece	18,741	16,200	-2,540	-13.5
Italy	41,444	37,200	-4,240	-10.2
Cyprus	1,961	1,400	-560	-28.6
Lithuania	4,612	2,300	-2,010	-50.1
Hungary	10,062	8,400	-1,660	-16.5
Netherlands	5,999	4,900	-1,100	-18.3
Romania	24,736	21,900	-2,840	-11.5
Slovenia	1,499	1,200	-300	-20
Finland	4,722	3,400	-1,320	-28
Sweden	8,910	7,000	-1,910	-21.4

Source: Labour Force Survey 2024 and Labour Force Survey 2023