

# Wildfires burn out of control in Greece and Turkey as thousands flee

**Protracted heatwave continues as flames threaten populated areas, electricity installations and historic sites**



Kourkouli village during the night amid the wildfires, in Evia, Greece, on 5 August 2021. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*Associated Press*

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Thousands of people have fled wildfires that are burning out of control in Greece and **Turkey**, including a large blaze just north of Athens that left one person dead, as a protracted heatwave turned forests into tinderboxes and flames threatened populated areas, electricity installations and historical sites.

Turkey's wildfires, described as the worst in decades, have swept through swathes of the southern coast for the past 10 days, killing eight people.

In **Greece**, firefighters were battling 56 active wildfires on Friday, Civil Protection chief Nikos Hardalias said. Multiple evacuation orders were issued for inhabited areas of the mainland and the nearby island of Evia, while the fire

near Athens burned forests and houses in its path heading toward Lake Marathon, the capital's main water reservoir.

“We continue our effort hour by hour to tackle the multiple fires we face today,” Hardalias said. “Conditions are exceptionally dangerous.” The wind picked up on Friday afternoon in many parts of Greece, increasing the risk of fires.

Athens's main trauma hospital said a 38-year-old man had died after sustaining a head injury from a falling utility pole in Ippokrateios Politeia, one of the neighbourhoods north of Athens affected by the fire.

[Try watching this video on www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

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Greek prime minister says 'worst is yet to come' as wildfires rage around Athens – video

On Evia, the coastguard mounted a major operation to evacuate hundreds of people by sea, using patrol vessels, fishing and tourist boats and private vessels to rescue residents and holidaymakers overnight and into Friday. Dozens of other villages and neighbourhoods were emptied in the southern Peloponnese region and just north of the Greek capital as blazes raced through pine forests.

“We're talking about the apocalypse, I don't know how [else] to describe it,” Sotiris Danikas, head of the coastguard in the town of Aidipsos on Evia, told state broadcaster ERT, describing the sea evacuation.

The coastguard said 668 people had been evacuated from beaches in north-east Evia by early Friday afternoon after flames cut off all other means of escape. Coastguard vessels continued to patrol the coastline.

A coastguard vessel was also rescuing another 10 people trapped on a beach by another fire near the town of Gythio in the southern Peloponnese region.

Greek and European officials have blamed the climate crisis for the multiple fires burning through swaths of southern **Europe**, from southern Italy to the Balkans, Greece and Turkey. Massive fires have been burning across Siberia in the north of Russia for weeks, while hot, bone-dry, gusty weather has also

fuelled devastating wildfires in California, destroying whole towns in some cases.



## Eight dead as wildfires continue to rage across southern Europe

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Greece has been baked by its most protracted heatwave in three decades, with temperatures soaring to 45C (113F). Thousands have fled homes and holiday accommodation, while at least 20 people, including four firefighters, have been treated for injuries. Two of the firefighters were in intensive care in Athens, while another two were in hospital with light burns, the health ministry said.

More than 1,000 firefighters and nearly 20 aircraft are battling huge fires across Greece, while extra firefighters, planes, helicopters and vehicles were arriving from France, Switzerland, Romania, Cyprus, Croatia, Israel and Sweden.

In Turkey, authorities on Friday evacuated six more neighbourhoods near the Mugla province town of Milas as a wildfire fanned by winds burned 3 miles (5km) away from a power plant. At least 36,000 people were evacuated to safety in Mugla province alone, officials said.

Meanwhile, several excavators cleared strips of land to form firebreaks in a bid to stop flames from reaching the Yenikoy power plant, the second such facility to be threatened by wildfires in the region.

Wildfires near the tourism resort of Marmaris, also in Mugla province, were largely contained by late Thursday, officials said, while by Friday afternoon, the two main fires in neighbouring Antalya province were brought under control and cooling efforts were under way, agriculture and forestry minister Bekir Pakdemirli tweeted.

In Greece, firefighters went door-to-door in areas about 12.5 miles north of Athens telling people to evacuate, while helicopters dropped water on towering flames and thick smoke blanketed the area. Authorities sent push alerts to mobile phones in the area urging residents to leave, while a refugee camp on the outskirts of the capital was evacuated overnight. Constant flare-ups that threatened inhabited areas hampered the work of hundreds of firefighters there.

The fire halted traffic on the country's main highway connecting Athens to northern Greece and damaged electricity installations. The power distribution company announced rolling cuts in the wider capital region to protect the electrical grid.

In the Drosopigi area, resident Giorgos Hatzispiros surveyed the damage to his house on Friday morning, the first time he was seeing it after being ordered to evacuate the previous afternoon. Only the charred walls of the single-storey home remained, along with his children's bicycles, somehow unscathed in a storeroom. Inside, smoke rose from a still-smouldering bookcase.

"Nothing is left," Hatzispiros said. He urged his mother to leave, to spare her the sight of their destroyed home.

In southern Greece, dozens of villages and settlements were evacuated, where a blaze was stopped before reaching monuments at Olympia, birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games.

The fires also disrupted Covid-19 vaccinations. The health ministry announced the suspension of vaccinations at centres in fire-affected areas, saying appointments could be rescheduled when conditions allowed.

In a televised address on Thursday night, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the prime minister, said: "Our priority is always the protection of human life, followed by the protection of property, the natural environment and critical infrastructure.

Unfortunately, under these circumstances, achieving all these aims at the same time is simply impossible.”

He said the wildfires displayed the reality of the climate crisis.

In 2018, more than 100 people died when a fast-moving forest fire engulfed a seaside settlement east of Athens. Some of them drowned trying to escape by sea from the smoke and flames after becoming trapped on a beach.