

The fastest warming continent: Europe's deadly heat waves

August 24 2023, by Olivier THIBAULT



Cooling off in Rome in July during another heat wave summer in Europe.

The sizzling temperatures experienced by several countries in southern Europe over the past days are part of a series of brutally hot, dry summers caused by climate change.

Spain has been sweltering under its fourth [heat](#) wave of the season, while Greece is struggling for the second time in a month against major wildfires.

Emissions of greenhouse gases are enabling increasingly intense and long-lasting [heat waves](#), especially in Europe, which the World Meteorological Organization says is the world's fastest warming continent.

AFP looks back at a series of heat waves in Europe that have left tens of thousands of people dead.

2022: hottest ever

The summer of 2022 was the hottest in Europe's recorded history, and caused the worst drought in centuries and devastating wildfires in France and Spain.

Two heat waves, one in mid-June and one in July, also made it one of the deadliest summers in years, according to the Nature Medicine journal, which estimates the heat killed more than 61,000 people.

France recorded the biggest rise in heat compared to its previous summer average, with a jump of 2.43 degrees Celsius (36.37 Fahrenheit), Nature's figures showed.

The mercury topped 40C for the first time in the UK in July.

2021: blistering heat in Greece

Between late July and early August, Greece endured the country's worst heat wave in over 30 years.

In Spain, temperatures hit 47C in parts of the south.

The resulting drought sparked large wildfires along the Mediterranean, from Turkey to Spain.

2019: Northern Europe swelters

The summer of 2019 brought two heat waves, one in late June and one in mid-July.

In France, temperatures hit an all-time record 46C in the southern town of Verargues.

In late July, northern Europe sizzled, with temperatures of 42.6C recorded at Lingen in northwestern Germany.

2018: drought drains the Danube

The second half of July and beginning of August 2018 saw very high temperatures across much of Europe.

The Danube fell to its lowest level in 100 years in some areas, exposing World War II tanks in Serbia submerged since the conflict.

2017: months of mugginess

Much of Europe, but especially the south, sweated in a series of heat waves from late June well into August.

Spain experienced a record 47.3C on July 13 in the southern town of Montoro.

2015: back-to-back heat waves

It was heat wave after heat wave throughout the [summer](#) of 2015.

In Britain, roads melted and trains were delayed in what was at the time the hottest July on record.

2007: Greek forests ablaze

Central and southern Europe were parched throughout June and July.

In Greece, the worst forest fires in half a century—some believed to be the result of arson but others the product of heat and drought—consumed four percent of the country's forests.

2003: 70,000 dead

Britain, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal all experienced exceptional heat in the first half of August.

An EU study of 16 nations puts the number of excess deaths across the bloc during the heat wave as high as 70,000.

In France, most of the estimated 15,000-20,000 fatalities were elderly people left to fend for themselves. Since then the country has devised new systems to protect vulnerable people from the heat.

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