

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001700/24
to the Commission
Giuseppe Antoci (The Left)
(13 September 2024)**

Subject: Information on managing and preventing fires in Sicily and Italy

Recent data released by the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) and the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) ⁽¹⁾ illustrate the alarming situation regarding fires in Italy, with Sicily particularly affected. From 1 January to 30 July 2024, 615 fires were detected across Italy, covering a total area of 221 km². More specifically, the amount of forested areas damaged by fires in the first eight months of 2024 came to 40 km² of forest area, or 18% of the total.

Land in 12 out of 20 Italian regions has been affected by fire. The most affected regions are Sicily, Calabria, Sardinia and Puglia, accounting for around 85% of the total burnt area across Italy ⁽²⁾. Sicily in particular accounts for 45% of the total ⁽³⁾, with the Province of Agrigento the most affected ⁽⁴⁾.

Given the frequency and increasing intensity of these events:

1. Can the Commission say what initiatives are envisaged for improving fire risk management, especially in highly vulnerable areas such as Sicily?
2. How can it support local and regional authorities in implementing effective prevention strategies, especially in terms of funding advanced technologies and critical infrastructure?
3. What action will it take to strengthen the capacity for immediate response and the effectiveness of preventive measures across the EU?

Submitted: 13.9.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Šefčovič on behalf of the European Commission
(29 October 2024)**

1. The primary responsibility for disaster risk management lies with Member State authorities. The Commission's main role is to coordinate a response through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) ⁽¹⁾ when activated. The Commission also supports national efforts with financial support such as under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) ⁽²⁾ or the forest fire prevention and restoration measures under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development ⁽³⁾.

2. The Commission supports local and regional authorities in implementing effective prevention strategies through funding from the ERDF in technologies for early detection and monitoring of fires, as well as critical infrastructure to enhance resilience against fire hazards. In Sicily the ERDF Regional Programme 2021-2027 allocates around EUR 204 million of EU resources to investments related to environmental risks ⁽⁴⁾.

3. The Commission has established a fleet of planes and helicopters under rescEU ⁽⁵⁾ in 2019. The Commission is also working on creating a permanent wildfire fleet, comprising new aircraft ⁽⁶⁾ dedicated to EU-coordinated response operations.

One of the key activities for institutional capacity development is the UCPM peer review programme ⁽⁷⁾. After the 2023 wildfire season, the Italian Civil Protection Department requested a peer review of its wildfire risk management system ⁽⁸⁾.

Finally, the Commission has established the Expert Group on Forest Fires, which allows for the exchange of good practices among the fire management services of the EU countries and its neighbours. Through the Copernicus European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS), the Commission also provides most advance technology for the assessment of fire danger and real time monitoring of wildfires.

¹ <https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/istituto-informa/comunicati-stampa/anno-2024/incendi-forestali-da-gennaio-a-luglio-2024-in-linea-con-la-media-dal-2006-episodi-piu-gravi-in-sicilia-e-sardegna-a-vieste-salva-la-copertura-forestale>.

² <https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/files2024/area-stampa/comunicati-stampa/tabella3.pdf>.

³ <https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/files2024/area-stampa/comunicati-stampa/figura-1.pdf>.

⁴ 448 km² of land affected by fire.

⁽¹⁾ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en

⁽²⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/erdf_en

⁽³⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-agricultural-fund-rural-development-eafrd_en

⁽⁴⁾ Of which EUR 55 million are estimated to be invested on risk prevention and management measures related to fires.

⁽⁵⁾ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/resceu_en

⁽⁶⁾ Planned to become gradually operational as of end 2027.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/disaster-prevention-and-risk-management/ucpm-peer-review-programme>

⁽⁸⁾ The report is planned to be finalised before end of 2024 and will highlight good practices and provide recommendations.