

(English version)

Question for written answer E-004487/25
to the Commission
Sérgio Gonçalves (S&D)
(12 November 2025)

Subject: Distribution of rescEU aerial firefighting fleet

The EU is acquiring 12 new amphibious firefighting aircraft under the rescEU fleet, with a total investment of EUR 600 million, to reinforce Europe's capacity to respond to wildfires. These new planes will be hosted by six Member States, including Portugal, as part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

However, the region of Madeira, as an outermost region, faces specific challenges that differ from mainland territories. Its steep, mountainous terrain, isolation and lack of adequate refilling bases make the use of large aircraft operationally unsuitable for the effective tackling of the recurrent wildfires. The region's needs are better met through the permanent stationing of firefighting helicopters, which are more adapted to the region's geography, rapid response requirements and freshwater basins.

Given this context, would the Commission consider, when deploying the new rescEU aircraft, the distribution of the existing firefighting helicopters within the mechanism, to ensure that they are stationed in areas where they are most needed and most effective, including in regions such as Madeira?

Submitted: 12.11.2025

Answer given by Ms Lahbib on behalf of the European Commission
(6 February 2026)

Member States are primarily responsible for civil protection, including for firefighting operations. The EU has a supporting competence.

When a country is overwhelmed by a disaster, it may request emergency assistance through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾.

RescEU ⁽³⁾ was established in response to the tragic fires in Portugal in 2017 and is today a core component of the UCPM, acting as an additional layer of protection. This strengthens the EU's capacity to respond to major emergencies such as wildfires.

To maximise operational effectiveness across the Europe, the Commission ensures that rescEU resources are strategically and geographically distributed.

In 2019, the Member States agreed to distribute the rescEU fleet by positioning 12 medium amphibious aircraft in Southern Europe, whereas helicopters were considered more adequate in Central Europe.

The six Member States selected to host the new fleet of 12 amphibious firefighting aircraft — including Portugal — were chosen in consultation with Member States' authorities, based on needs and risk levels.

Although it was not initially considered to station a helicopter in Madeira, the rescEU fleet can reach the island in a reasonable time for response operations, as demonstrated in 2024.

In recent years, the Commission has strategically pre-positioned firefighters in high-risk areas across Europe, including Portugal.

These teams are on standby to assist host Member States, supporting quicker response times to wildfires. The Commission attaches particular attention to addressing the specific needs of the EU's outermost regions, such as Madeira.

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

⁽²⁾ In 2024, the UCPM was activated to assist in combating wildfires in Madeira.

⁽³⁾ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/resceu_en.