



By: TA | AP Insight

# Wildfires in France and Spain drive tens of thousands of people from their homes



A **raging wildfire** in southwest France forced the evacuation of 55,000 people overnight Sunday, bringing the total forced out of their homes to a staggering 220,000 in one region alone, as flames crept ever closer to the wine region city of Bordeaux.

Neighboring Spain oversaw its own **fire evacuations** on the country's east coast.

Shifting and gusting winds, as well as arid conditions, complicated massive efforts to limit the spread of the monster blaze that has burned out of control since midweek in France's Gironde region, where Bordeaux is located.

Authorities issued overnight evacuation orders for five more localities southwest of the historic city.

"The situation remains very unfavorable," French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said after what he described as "another difficult night" for fire crews battling round-the-clock against the blaze that has burned an area four times the size of Paris.

"The fire became extremely virulent again and unpredictable, generating its own winds and advancing erratically toward the Bordeaux metropolitan area," Nunez posted on X.

"It became calmer by the end of the night," the minister added.

## Pope calls for prayers for victims of the 'devastating wildfires'

At the end of his Sunday Angelus prayer, Pope Leo XIV referenced "the devastating wildfires" in France and Spain and said: "I express my solidarity and invite everyone to pray for those affected and for the work of the rescue workers."

By Sunday morning, an estimated 42,000 hectares (162 square miles) had burned in Gironde, the region's prefecture said, much of

it forests and scrubland made tinder-dry by **successive heat waves**.

That is seven times the area of Manhattan island and four times the size of Paris.

Firefighters raced in trucks to fight flare-ups and planes that drop water and retardants rotated in the smoke-filled air. Farmers delivered water in big tanks to fire crews so they could fight the flames without interruption.

"This allows firefighters to focus on the fire," said Theo Hernandez, a wine grower. "It's very strong, very virulent, it's spreading everywhere."

"We hope it stops soon," he said.

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Soldiers have also been called in. A giant A400M military cargo aircraft that has been converted for firefighting will also be used again, the minister said.

On Saturday, it swooped low over arid, fire-threatened woodlands to drop a long plume of ochre-colored retardant.

The Gironde prefecture said 75 firefighters have been treated for injuries and that the blaze has destroyed 240 homes.

## Blaze has created virulent firestorms

In a first for France, the blaze has alarmingly developed into a self-feeding firestorm on

several occasions, most recently on Saturday night, generating bolts of lightning that can start new flare-ups, Gironde authorities said.

"It's like being confronted by a hurricane," Gironde fire chief Marc Vermeulen said.

**Evacuees won't be allowed back to their towns and villages until the blaze is brought under control**

A forecast return of high temperatures starting Tuesday could further complicate the firefighting, Gironde prefect Sophie Brocas said.

Evacuees won't be allowed back to their towns and villages until the blaze is brought under control, she warned. She also urged holiday makers not to come to the region that has popular Atlantic beaches and some of France's largest woodlands.

## Fire creeps toward Bordeaux but the city isn't evacuating

Bordeaux Mayor Thomas Cazenave described the blaze as being "at the gates of the metropolitan area," about 15 kilometers (9 miles) away at its closest point.

The Gironde prefect ordered the partial closure of a major highway heading in and out of the city.

But Cazenave said an evacuation of Bordeaux is not on the cards for now. The city is home to 268,000 people.

**Bordeaux has turned a giant exhibition center into an emergency shelter for evacuees**

Bordeaux has turned a giant exhibition center into an emergency shelter for evacuees, providing camp beds and food for thousands of people, including hundreds of older people

evacuated from care homes.

A second fire burning farther south in the Landes region has also forced the evacuation of 36,000 people this week, driving the total number of displaced people in southwest France to more than 250,000. Nunez said 550 firefighters were still engaged Sunday against that blaze.

Fire crews have also been battling a separate blaze in the Var region of southern France on the Mediterranean. Nearly 3,000 people have been evacuated there.

## Tens of thousands of people also forced out of their homes in Spain

In Spain, wildfires burned out of control around Madrid. Fire evacuations were also carried out Sunday in the Valencia region.

A man was killed in a wildfire in Manises, a suburb of Valencia, that raged for four hours Saturday, the local government said, marking Spain's first recorded death in the latest fires.



*A total of 76,000 people have been evacuated in Spain while 30,000 others have been confined to their homes*

"We still have some difficult hours ahead," Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said Sunday, but the night was "very positive in terms of bringing the flames under control."

A total of 76,000 people have been evacuated in Spain while 30,000 others have been

confined to their homes, according to fresh government figures on Sunday.

Evacuees fretted about what they'll find when they're allowed to return.

"It looked like the apocalypse. You couldn't see anything. Everything was covered in ash," said Rocío Domínguez, who evacuated with her dog, Simba, from Chapinería, west of Madrid.

"We don't know when we get to the town, if we'll have half the house burned down or we'll have it intact or we won't have a house," she said. "All the clothes, all the memories, everything."