



Hellenic Red Cross supports rescue teams to stop the fires from spreading.

Photo: Hellenic Red Cross



Managing the risks from summer weather in a changing climate

Summer weather anticipatory action, preparedness and response by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Europe and Central Asia

Recent summers have been marked by unprecedented heat, widespread drought, and escalating wildfires across Europe and Central Asia, as Europe continues to warm twice as fast and Central Asia nearly twice as fast as the global average. These patterns underscore the growing climate-related vulnerability across the region and the need for a focus on preparedness measures taken before hazards turn into disasters to save lives, protect livelihoods and strengthen long-term climate resilience.

This briefing note gives some insights into changing summer climate hazards in Europe and Central Asia and showcases National Red Cross and Red Crescent Society selected best practices in heatwave, wildfire and drought anticipatory action, preparedness and response activities. It also explores how our rapidly changing climate is reshaping seasonal risk patterns and provides practical guidance on how National Societies can further strengthen preparedness and resilience in the face of intensifying summer hazards. Through the exchange of experiences from across the region, we aim to strengthen coordinated climate action and preparedness.

The hazards of summer weather in Europe and Central Asia



HEATWAVE

A [heatwave](#) is a prolonged period of unusually high temperatures compared to the average of a region. Temperatures can feel hotter when humidity is high and may be worsened in cities due to the urban heat island effect. Heatwaves can severely affect people's physical and mental health, increase the risk of wildfires, damage crops, and disrupt infrastructure and essential services. As the climate warms, heatwaves are becoming more frequent and intense and they last longer.



WILDFIRES

A [wildfire](#) is a fast-moving, uncontrolled fire, often triggered by natural causes (such as lightning) or by human carelessness (such as discarded cigarette). Hot, dry and windy weather, along with dry vegetation, create ideal conditions for wildfires to ignite and intensify. The spread of wildfires depends on the layout of land, available fuel (like vegetation or dead wood), and weather conditions. Climate change influences these weather conditions by increasing temperature, reducing soil moisture and extending fire seasons. They can start in just seconds and turn into infernos in a matter of minutes.



DROUGHT

[Droughts](#) occur when an area faces a prolonged lack of precipitation (rainfall, snowfall or snowmelt) which reduces soil moisture and water availability. Climate change intensifies these factors by increasing temperatures and disrupting rainfall patterns, making droughts more frequent, severe, and long-lasting. They can lead to water shortages for drinking, farming, and sanitation, causing food insecurity, health impacts, economic losses, and greater strain on vulnerable communities.

Austrian Red Cross runs summer cooling centres, open to visitors who seek respite from the heat, particularly older people, children, and people with chronic illnesses who are the most at risk during heatwaves.

Photo: Austrian Red Cross

Practical approaches to summer weather anticipatory action, preparedness and response by the IFRC network

Most National Societies in Europe and Central Asia have activities in place to prepare for and respond to summer weather hazards. The following best practices demonstrate different practical approaches implemented across the region.

Summer weather preparedness and anticipatory action

The goal of preparedness and anticipatory activities is to prevent and reduce the impacts of disasters on communities.

Anticipatory action

Several National Societies have developed [anticipatory action](#) plans, using weather and climate forecasts and pre-defined measures to reduce the impact before extreme heat peaks to reduce health impacts, strengthen community readiness and ensure that people most at risk receive timely support:

- Through the anticipatory pillar of the [IFRC Disaster Response Emergency Fund \(DREF\)](#), Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies can access pre-agreed funding when scientific forecasts indicate that a hazard is likely to reach dangerous levels. These Early Action Protocols enable rapid delivery of early actions through the prepositioning of stock and general readiness before the event. Types of early actions include first aid, public messaging, community outreach, distribution of water and other protection items, and provision of cooling spaces. Examples include [Albania Heatwave simplified EAP](#), [Kyrgyzstan Heatwave EAP](#) and [Tajikistan Heatwave EAP](#).
- [Collaboration with national hydrometeorological agencies](#) and support for the delivery of public awareness messages to communities on what action to take. For example, the **Hellenic Red Cross** issues public warnings with the national observatory; and the **Spanish Red Cross** activates its national heat health campaign whenever meteorological agencies issue heatwave forecasts.
- Proactive outreach to at-risk groups ahead of forecast heatwaves ensures the people most exposed receive support in advance. For example, the **Red Cross of North Macedonia** and **Spanish Red Cross** use phone and hotline services to provide proactive outreach; the **Hellenic Red Cross** positions volunteers in high-risk public areas to offer hydration and first aid; and the **Luxembourg Red Cross** provides home visits for isolated elderly people.

The Red Crescent of Kyrgyzstan responds to heat, taking care of the most vulnerable.

Photo: Red Crescent of Kyrgyzstan



Community preparedness

Community centred communication, outreach, and education campaigns designed to reduce heat-health risks by raising awareness, promoting protective behaviours, and targeting vulnerable groups through schools, youth clubs, public spaces, and social media include:

- **Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society** ran community-based heat-safety outreach campaigns in Baku, Sumqayit, and southern/central regions.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina Red Cross** carried out information-sharing and educational activities on heat health.
- **Italian Red Cross** delivered heatwave awareness activities to inform residents how to stay safe in extreme heat. This includes a campaign on domestic planning for heatwaves and offering free skin-health checks,
- **Portuguese Red Cross** works with youth networks to promote sun-protection and heatwave awareness.
- **Spanish Red Cross** conducts a national annual heatwave awareness campaign aligned with meteorological alerts, focusing especially on older people, children, and homeless communities.
- **Russian Red Cross** shares heat-related public health information on social networks to reach wide audiences across its regions.

National Societies increasingly work with children and schools to embed early heat-safety knowledge, using interactive methods such as games, storytelling, and youth-led activities to build long-term heat resilience from an early age:

- As part of the annual 2 June Heat Action Day, **Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent** and **Tajikistan Red Crescent** hold events in collaboration with schools on heat-safety behaviours.
- **British Red Cross** provides youth resources through “Weather Together,” giving young people tools to understand and prepare for extreme weather events.
- **Turkish Red Crescent** includes school-based activities through *Kızılay Clubs*, such as distributing water, sun-protection items, and running child-oriented workshops on heat.

Resilience and disaster risk reduction

Many Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are advancing longer-term resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) approaches by helping municipalities and residents reduce exposure to extreme heat, support planning approaches to manage climate risks, and develop local resilience strategies.

- **Spanish Red Cross** works to address energy poverty as a one of the underlying drivers of heat vulnerability. Households living in poorly insulated homes, lacking access to adequate cooling, face significant increasing health risks. Vulnerable households learn to better understand and manage indoor climate risks by monitoring indoor temperature, humidity and energy conditions and support through community workshops. This citizen-generated data helps make energy poverty more visible, strengthens community awareness of climate risks, and supports more targeted action by enabling earlier identification of households most exposed to extreme heat.
- **British Red Cross** collaborates with local councils to map heat islands and identify cool spaces, using participatory workshops and community advocates to inform DRR planning and help neighbourhoods understand and reduce their exposure to extreme heat.

- **Netherlands Red Cross** works with national and local governments to develop heat plans, ensuring that community perspectives, climate scenarios, and risk-reduction priorities are embedded into long-term planning and governance frameworks.
- **Portuguese Red Cross** improves community resilience through nature-based urban adaptation, enhancing public parks by planting trees to reduce heat exposure and installing permeable pathways to absorb heavy rainfall, reducing long-term heat and flood risks.
- **Spanish Red Cross** strengthens city level disaster risk reduction through its Urban Climate Resilience Program in Madrid and Valencia, applying a tool for measuring climate resilience in communities to identify vulnerabilities, support municipal planning, and integrate community feedback into urban risk reduction strategies.
- The EU-funded [Pathways2Resilience](#) initiative supports the shift towards transformative adaptation, helping cities and regions implement dedicated heat strategies. The Climate Centre amplifies impact by fostering learning and partnerships between local governments and the Red Cross Red Crescent network.

Summer weather response

When extreme summer weather strikes, National Societies have been increasingly mobilized, providing life-saving support to at-risk communities. Some examples of actions across Europe and Central Asia include:

- Providing direct support to people evacuating from fast-moving wildfires, ensuring safe movement and immediate relief through the provision of first aid, and food, hygiene products and psychosocial support.
- Dedicated services to emergency responders, recognising the extreme strain caused by prolonged wildfire operations. The **Portuguese Red Cross** provided shelters for firefighters equipped with beds, hygiene kits, physiotherapy, and cooling; the **Hellenic Red Cross** provided hydration and first aid to firefighters in the field; and the **Turkish Red Crescent** delivered mobile catering units for front line workers.
- Heatwave response included rapid protection through cooling centres, hydration support, first aid, and outreach to vulnerable people, including phone-based check-ins and public-space interventions by volunteers. These measures are implemented by the **Austrian, Spanish, French, and Hungarian Red Cross, and the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan** among others.
- Cross-border coordination during concurrent crises through the IFRC regional network supported multi-country response coordination during widespread heat and wildfire events in 2025 across Spain, Greece, Montenegro, Türkiye, France, and others.

The Italian Red Cross runs a "Climate and Health" campaign, which provides a home heat emergency plan for families and offers free skin-health checks.

Photo: Italian Red Cross

Changing summer climate hazards



HEATWAVES

Europe and [Central Asia](#) are warming faster than other regions, with Europe warming twice as fast as the global average since the 1980s, with heatwaves increasing in frequency and severity. In Europe, the last [11 years have been the 11 warmest years ever recorded](#), and in Central Asia, the [2021-2025 period was the warmest ever recorded](#). Heatwaves are projected to increase under the influence of [anthropogenic climate change](#).

In 2022, heatwaves contributed to [60,000 excess deaths](#) across Europe. In 2026, [record temperatures for May were experienced](#) in Western Europe, followed by a heatwave in [June which broke numerous records](#). [World Weather Attribution \(WWA\)](#) analysis highlights that health risks associated with unusually hot nights are about 100 times more likely to occur than they were in 2003.

[Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan](#), heavily reliant on agriculture, experienced severe heatwaves in March 2025 during the key flowering and planting seasons, resulting in low agricultural yields. [WWA](#) found that due to human-induced climate change, such events are now about three times more likely.

In Central Asia, summer warmth is also increasing, which increases glacier melt in the Tien Sian mountains. This increases the risk of cascading landslides, flooding, and affects [water resources](#).



WILDFIRES

Europe saw the worst wildfire season in recorded history in 2025, when [1 million hectares across the continent](#) and the Mediterranean basin were burnt. Below average river flows contributed significantly to the dry conditions that helped the fires spread. For both [Europe](#) and [Central Asia](#), the IPCC projects with high confidence that fire seasons will lengthen, larger areas will burn, and wildfires will increasingly affect areas not traditionally prone to fire.



DROUGHT

Higher temperatures can make droughts more severe by increasing evaporation which reduces soil moisture and intensifies related impacts. Central Asia has been experiencing [drought conditions since 2021](#), severely impacting crop production, and Europe experienced [its most extreme drought](#) on record in 2022, with extensive impacts on agriculture, ecosystems and energy production. [Drought conditions are projected to intensify](#) under all climate scenarios, especially in Southern and Central Europe, with the Mediterranean region experiencing twice as many droughts by the end of the century.

For more detail on the climate risks in each part of the region, please refer to the [Eurasia](#) and [Central Asia](#) climate fact sheets from the Climate Centre.

Adjusting our work to a changing climate

As we witness the changes in summer weather, the urgency grows for National Societies to adapt our anticipatory action, preparedness and response to these challenges. The tools and approaches below can support National Societies in changing risks into account in their plans, programmes and operations.

Climate smart programmes and humanitarian operations. A starting point for National Societies is the integration of available short-term weather and seasonal forecasts and long-term climate projections in designing and/or adjusting all programmes and operations. By analyzing changing risks, we can adjust our work accordingly, to ensure that, at a minimum, we do not place people at increased risk in the future considering likely new climate extremes and growing vulnerabilities. This [guide](#) explains how this can be achieved.

Locally led adaptation. Locally led adaptation provides a useful framework for National Societies to create climate solutions, guided by community wisdom and lived experience. The [Climate Action Journey](#)¹ provides an overview of this approach, with locally led adaptation as a central goal.

Vulnerability mapping. [Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment](#), is a participatory community risk assessment process enabling communities to assess and analyze the risks they face, which members of the community are most exposed and what initiatives can be undertaken to strengthen coping capacities and reduce the risks.

Local heat action planning. Planning locally with dedicated plans for action on heat health are an important step in addressing the loss of life, health concerns, productivity and livelihood issues. [This guide](#) provides further support to local red cross branches or districts.

Public awareness and public engagement messages. Information shared in a timely and accessible manner by trusted sources enables communities to stay safe and save lives, offering practical advice on effective risk communication and guidelines on specific hazards.

Resources

Want to read more on the topic? Please refer to:

- Flagship Report "[Heat: Through the eyes of the most vulnerable-Perceptions and pathways to action | IFRC](#)"
- [Thematic Brief on Heat and Health](#) (Finnish Red Cross)
- Key messages for [Extreme Heat / Heatwaves](#), [Wildfires](#), and [Drought](#)
- [Heat Toolkit](#)
- [Europe Region Climate Action Roadmap](#)
- [Eurasia Climate Fact Sheet](#) and [Central Asia Climate Fact Sheet](#)

© International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2023

Any part of this publication may be cited, copied, translated into other languages or adapted to meet local needs without prior permission from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, provided that the source is clearly stated.

Contact us:

Requests for commercial reproduction should be directed to the IFRC Secretariat:

Address: Chemin des Crêts 17, Petit-Saconnex, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland

Postal address: P.O. Box 303, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland

T +41 (0)22 730 42 22 | **F** +41 (0)22 730 42 00 | **E** secretariat@ifrc.org | **W** ifrc.org

Follow us:

www.ifrc.org | twitter.com/ifrc | facebook.com/ifrc | instagram.com/ifrc | youtube.com/user/ifrc | tiktok.com/@ifrc

For more information, contact:

Paula Haro

Senior Officer, Climate & Resilience
IFRC Regional Office for Europe
paula.haro@ifrc.org

Fleur Monasso

Europe Climate Lead, Head Locally Led Adaptation,
Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre
monasso@climatecentre.org