

Europe Heatwave 2026, Causes, Impacts & WMO Warnings

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Why in the News? : Europe is witnessing one of its most severe heatwaves in recent history during June 2026. According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the extreme heat has affected over 150 million people and caused more than 1,300 excess deaths, drawing global attention to the growing impacts of climate change.

About Europe Heatwave 2026

The **Europe Heatwave 2026** is one of the most **intense and widespread heatwaves** recorded on the continent. Beginning over the **Iberian Peninsula**, it gradually spread across Western, Central, Southern Europe and the Balkans, with **many countries experiencing record-breaking temperatures**.

- Several countries **recorded temperatures above 40°C**, while many experienced their **hottest June or highest-ever temperatures**.
- According to the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**, Europe has warmed by nearly **2°C since the historic 1976 heatwave**, making it the **fastest-warming continent in the world**.

- The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** has warned that heatwaves are expected to become more frequent, more intense, and longer-lasting as global warming continues.

Major Temperature Records

The heatwave broke numerous national and regional temperature records across Europe.

- **Germany** recorded 41.7°C at Coschen, while more than 250 weather stations registered their highest-ever temperatures. The country also experienced exceptionally warm nights, with East Saxony recording a minimum temperature of 29.4°C.
- **France** recorded its hottest day on record, with a national average temperature of 30°C and a maximum temperature of 43.8°C. Authorities issued Red Alerts across 58 departments and warned of an increased risk of wildfires.
- **Spain** experienced its hottest June days on record, with temperatures exceeding 40°C in several regions.
- **Hungary** (40.7°C), **Austria** (40°C), **Poland**, the **Czech Republic**, **Switzerland**, **Denmark**, the **Netherlands**, and the **United Kingdom** also recorded new June or all-time temperature records.

Causes of the Heatwave in Europe

The Europe Heatwave 2026 resulted from the combined effects of unusual atmospheric conditions and long-term climate change.

- **Rapid Warming of Europe:** Europe has warmed by around 2°C over the past five decades, almost twice the global average in many regions. This rapid warming has made the continent particularly vulnerable to prolonged and intense heatwaves.
- **Heat Dome and Omega Block:** A strong and stationary high-pressure system, known as a heat dome, remained over Western Europe for several days. This pattern is technically called an **“omega block”** (named for its resemblance to the Greek letter Ω), and it trapped hot air including air drawn up from the Sahara – close to the Earth’s surface, preventing cooler air from entering the region.
- **Human-Induced Climate Change:** According to the WMO, heatwaves of this intensity are becoming increasingly common in a warming world. Rising greenhouse gas emissions have increased both the frequency and severity of extreme heat events, making such episodes much more likely than in the past.
- **Urban Heat Island Effect:** Cities experienced even higher temperatures because buildings, roads, and concrete absorb and retain heat during the day and release it slowly at night. Limited green spaces and dense construction further reduced natural cooling.
- **Persistently Warm Nights:** One of the most dangerous features of this heatwave was the occurrence of tropical nights, when temperatures remained above 20°C even after sunset. Since the human body normally recovers during cooler nights, persistently high night-time temperatures significantly increase health risks.

Impact of Heatwaves in Europe

The Europe Heatwave 2026 had widespread impacts on human health, the environment, and the economy, highlighting the far-reaching consequences of extreme heat events.

Health Impacts: Extreme heat is often described as a “**silent killer**” because many heat-related deaths occur indirectly and are often underreported.

- According to the WHO, **more than 1,300 excess deaths were linked to the June 2026 heatwave.**
- **Over 150 million** people across Europe were affected by prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures.
- Heat stress occurs when the body absorbs more heat than it can release, leading to **dehydration, heat exhaustion, heatstroke, and even organ failure.**
- Older persons, young children, pregnant women, outdoor workers, homeless people, and individuals suffering from chronic diseases faced the highest risk.
- Persistently hot nights further increased the danger by preventing the body from cooling and recovering after daytime heat exposure.

Environmental and Economic Impacts: The prolonged heatwave also had significant environmental and economic consequences.

- Extremely dry conditions increased the **risk of forest fires, particularly in France and Spain.**
- High temperatures **worsened drought conditions, reduced soil moisture, and affected agriculture and water availability.**
- Electricity demand increased sharply because of **greater use of cooling systems, placing additional pressure on power grids.**
- **Transportation, education, tourism, and outdoor economic activities were disrupted** in several countries.
- **Freshwater ecosystems, biodiversity, and river systems also came under increasing stress** due to rising temperatures.

WMO and WHO Response

Recognising the growing threat of extreme heat, international organisations have strengthened their response mechanisms.

- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is providing climate monitoring, forecasts, and early warning guidance to national meteorological agencies.
- Under the **Early Warnings for All initiative**, timely heat warnings are being issued to help governments and communities prepare for dangerous temperatures.
- The WHO and WMO have jointly developed **Heat-Health Early Warning Systems** and **Heat Action Plans** to reduce heat-related illness and deaths.
- Through the **Global Heat Health Information Network (GHHIN)**, technical guidance is being provided to improve preparedness, governance, and long-term resilience against extreme heat.
- The **United Nations** has also called for stronger global cooperation to address the growing risks posed by climate change and extreme weather events.

Way Forward

- Strengthen Heat Action Plans and Heat-Health Early Warning Systems across countries.

- Promote climate-resilient urban planning through green spaces, cool roofs, better ventilation, and heat-resistant infrastructure.
- Improve the preparedness of healthcare systems to manage heat-related illnesses.
- Build resilient electricity, water supply, and disaster management systems to cope with prolonged heatwaves.
- Accelerate the transition to clean energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to address the root cause of global warming.
- Enhance public awareness and community participation to reduce heat-related health risks and improve climate resilience.

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