

Research for REGI Committee – Forest Fires of Summer 2022

Lessons to Draw from the Cohesion Policy Response



The year 2022 marked a significant increase in wildfire activity across Europe, with particular emphasis on nations such as France, Spain, Romania, Germany, Czechia, and Slovenia. In some instances, burnt area was 5-13 times higher than the past decade's average, accumulating to a total surface area more than three times the size of Luxembourg. This surge in wildfires was exacerbated by prolonged heatwaves, droughts especially in early spring, and strong or unusual wind patterns. Dry conditions led to the lowest recorded soil moisture in fifty years and 63% of rivers

registering far below-average discharge, emphasizing 2022 as the driest year in recent history. Some indicators of these conditions included increased fire activity in the alpine region and increased incidence of extreme fire behavior and pyrocumulonimbus formations (thunder clouds created by intense heat) in the Mediterranean region. Countries and regions traditionally considered low-risk for wildfires, found themselves grappling with large-scale fires and extreme fire behaviour.

The lack of experience, preparedness, and adequate resources in these areas significantly hindered containment efforts. Additionally, effective wildfire management in regions with unexploded ordinances (UXO) has emerged as a crucial concern, especially given the incidents in Slovenia, Germany, and the heightened risks in conflict zones like Ukraine, which was the second most burned country in Europe in 2022. Europe's protected zones, notably the Natura2000 sites, also reported a surge in wildfire occurrences and burned area, highlighting a critical absence of comprehensive fire management strategies.

The Cohesion Policy framework, including the Cohesion Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Interreg programme, and Solidarity Fund, supports wildfire risk management. Investments from previous cycles have contributed to reducing the risk of extreme wildfires and enhancing response systems, landscape management, and risk awareness. However, challenges in fund allocation, governance and lacking wildfire expertise within ministries have resulted in fund underutilization or reallocation, thereby undermining the sustainability of their impact. Notably, investments have leaned heavily towards

The present document is the executive summary of the study on Forest Fires Summer 2022. The full study, which is available in English can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/4zv6pKj>

detection and response, with insufficient attention to long-term resilience building, nature preservation, and prevention.

Research indicates that a focus on preventive measures yields cost-effective outcomes. An estimated EUR 1 investment in prevention could save EUR 4 to EUR 7 in response and recovery expenses. There is a pressing need to bolster investment in training and capability enhancement, as only a handful of countries believe their firefighting personnel are prepared for the intensifying wildfire threats. The study calls for increased investment in training, capacity building, and proactive measures such as fuel management, prescribed fire application, and forest health.




The potential of climate-smart sustainable forest management (SFM) and the alignment of funding instruments with global wildfire initiatives like the Landscape Fire Governance Framework or the FAO-UNEP Global Fire Management Hub could better serve the global wildland fire community's needs, leverage international expertise, and promote effective capacity development in fire management. Further recommendations include enhanced coordination across funding mechanisms, establishment of EU-wide legal frameworks, addressing funding shortcomings, promoting multi-stakeholder approaches, creating a centralized platform for wildfire investment, ensuring adequate funding and capacity for DG ECHO, in particular for the Wildfire Peer Review Assessment Framework, and forming an EU-coordinated wildfire expertise team. In terms of practical application, the need for clear guidelines on prescribed fire use, guidance for new fire-prone countries, strategy consolidation, expanding the scope of the Expert Exchange Programme, supporting a unified communication strategy and risk culture, promoting international collaboration and best practices, investing in training and standardization, reviewing management plans for protected areas, promoting research and innovation, and establishing a European Wildfire and Mitigation Fund is emphasised. The recommendations highlighted in this study aim to also enhance integrated wildfire management, funding accessibility and impact, and risk reduction across Europe.

Appropriateness of evaluated funding schemes fit to Integrated Fire Management

	Cohesion Funds	EU Solidarity Fund	European Regional Development Fund	Interreg
WILDFIRE PEER-REVIEW ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (DG-ECHO)				
Governance of wildfire risk management	?	×	?	✓
Wildfire risk assessment	?	×	?	?
Wildfire risk management planning	Ø	Ø	?	✓
Wildfire Prevention	×	×	?	✓
Wildfire Preparedness	✓	Ø	?	✓
Response	✓	Ø	?	✓
Recovery and lessons learned	Ø	Ø	?	Ø
GENERAL CRITERIA PROVIDED FOR THIS STUDY				
Wildlife and nature preservation	Ø	×	?	✓
Preventing and tackling forest fires	Ø	×	Ø	✓
Secure and rapid economic recovery	Ø	Ø	Ø	?

KEY:
 Are funds fit for addressing the listed criteria?
 ✓ yes × no Ø somewhat ? unknown

Source: Pau Costa Foundation (PCF) (authors analysis). Based on available information, the table analyses the perceived current appropriateness of the Cohesion Policy to ensure wildlife and nature conservation, prevent and tackle forest fires, and secure a rapid economic recovery offering a suggested level of fitness for each relevant policy/ fund based on how funds were used.

	EU Solidarity Fund	Cohesion Fund	European Regional Development	Interreg
 OBJECTIVES	Not intended to provide immediate emergency assistance, but to contribute to the restoration of normal living conditions	Support to Member States with a Gross National Income per capita below 90% EU-27 average to strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU	Strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU; with particular attention to reduce economic, environmental and social problems in urban areas	Support cooperation across regions and countries through funding of projects
 INVESTMENTS RELATED TO WILDFIRES	Restoring network infrastructure, including transport and communication; providing temporary accommodation and rescue; restoration of public and cultural assets; enabling businesses to recover; preventive infrastructure and cleaning-up operations	Improving the emergency response capacity (new equipment, PPI and vehicles); improving fire stations for professional and volunteer firefighters; fuel management; improving technological systems for preparedness and response (network of early warning systems)	*	Raising risk awareness, communication campaigns; training and capacity building for the response systems; improve planning in the prevention, preparedness and response to wildfires; fuels management; acquiring new vehicles; improving early warning systems**
 GAPS	Eligible operations are not fully aligned with the key principle of "Building Back Better" for disaster risk management	A small percentage of the budget was invested in long term measures such as improved planning, research and innovation projects, and educational projects		Project-type funding allows for testing and piloting approaches and best practices, but not necessarily to consolidation in territory without further investment

*With the information available on the EU websites and also national websites, it has not been possible to access the information on how much was specifically invested in wildfire risk reduction, nor the types of actions that have been funded for that purpose

**Only includes information of the Interreg V-A Spain Portugal Program (POCTEP)

Source: PCF, analysis by authors

Policy Recommendations can be grouped as follows:

Increasing Cohesion Policy Funding's Impact on Fire Management:

- ◆ **Ensure access to wildfire expertise** for ministries and national agencies to facilitate impactful and sustainable investments in wildfire risk reduction and support integrated fire management at landscape level across diverse stakeholder groups.
- ◆ **Facilitate access**, enhance transparency, and simplify Cohesion Policy funding schemes to provide more information and improve accessibility.
- ◆ **Assemble and incentivise an EU-coordinated wildfire expert pool** to evaluate/assess Cohesion Policy funding investments based on risk and regional needs and support/link to the DG-ECHO Wildfire Peer Review Assessment (Framework) program.
- ◆ **Enhance and improve databases** for better traceability and analysis of contributions to wildfire risk reduction via the various programmes and funding schemes.
- ◆ **Prioritise mid- and long-term risk reduction** investments and strategies over emphasizing preparedness and response capabilities mostly in the form of equipment.
- ◆ **The "Build Back Better Approach"** of the Sendai Framework must be adopted to enhance resilience against future disasters (i.e., in the rules of the EU Solidarity Fund).

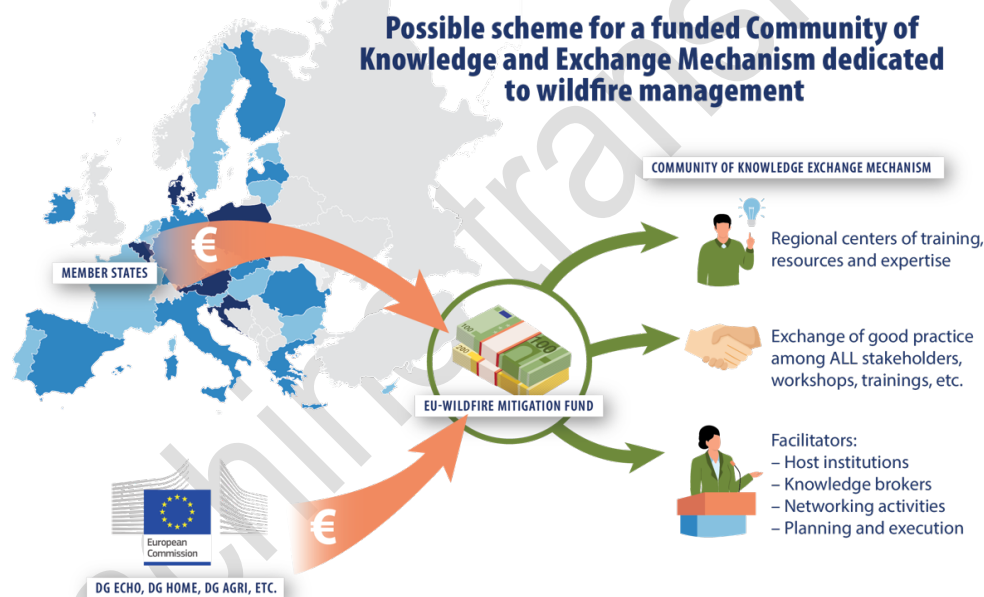
Governance of Wildfire Funding Instruments:

- ◆ **Enhance coordination** among funding mechanisms and with other EU instruments related to wildfire management.
- ◆ **Support/develop** EU-level legal frameworks for wildfire management.
- ◆ **Rectify funding shortcomings**, promote expertise, and address bottlenecks.
- ◆ **Promote multi-stakeholder approaches** by funding cross-cutting initiatives in integrated wildfire management (IFM).
- ◆ **Create a centralized platform** for information on funding available for integrated wildfire management-related projects or initiatives ("one-stop wildfire investment shop")

- ◆ **Ensure adequate funding** for wildfire governance support provided through DG-ECHO.

Practical Application of Wildfire-related Funding Mechanisms:

- ◆ **Guidelines** for safe and effective prescribed and tactical fire use must be developed.
- ◆ **Tailored guidance** is needed for new fire-prone countries.
- ◆ **Expand the scope of the DG-ECHO Expert Exchange Programme** to include important fire management stakeholders outside of only civil protection authorities.
- ◆ **Adopt** a common EU-wide wildfire risk awareness and communication strategy.
- ◆ **Promote international collaboration** and highlight good practices; collaborate with relevant organizations and support global initiatives like the Global Fire Management Hub.
- ◆ **Invest in/develop training and standardization** frameworks for safe operations.
- ◆ **Conduct comprehensive reviews** of management plans for wildfire-adaptive strategies.
- ◆ **Further promote research and innovation** for prevention and suppression technologies.
- ◆ **Establish a European Wildfire Mitigation Fund** as a dedicated sustainable fund for capacity development (trainings, exchange of experts, study tours, workshops, etc.) focussed on civil society actors, NGOs, institutions, and networks addressing integrated fire management at the landscape level.



Source: PCF

Further information

This executive summary is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Greek. The study, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/47v6pKj>

More information on Policy Department research for REGI: <https://research4committees.blog/regi/>

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