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CESI Firefighter Demands for Integrated Wildfire Risk Management in Europe

RESOLUTION

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from across Europe, with a total of more than 6 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI is a recognised European sectoral social partner and advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. CESI represents trade unions of employees and civil servants in local, regional, national and European administrations and public services – firefighter trade unions across Europe.

CESI calls for an EU approach to integrated wildfire risk management to deliver adequately staffed public fire services, safe working conditions and effective protection throughout firefighters' careers.

Prevention, preparedness, response and recovery must each include funded workforce measures, developed with firefighters and their trade unions.

European solidarity must strengthen the capacity of national and local services to protect workers and communities.

CESI generally welcomes the Council Recommendation of June 29 2026[1] and the Commission Communication of March 25 2026[2] on integrated wildfire risk management. In particular, the Council's provisions on workforce planning, working conditions and social partner involvement provide a basis for concrete improvements for firefighters.

At the same time, CESI considers that necessary investment staff, in equipment and coordination must be accompanied by increased permanent public capacity, quality employment and occupational health protection. This should be addressed further in the roll-out of the Recommendation and Communication.

CESI calls on Member States to adopt, before the 2027 wildfire season, funded implementation plans identifying responsible authorities, recruitment and relief needs, occupational protection measures and consultation arrangements. Member States must enforce existing obligations and remedy identified deficiencies.

[1] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11280-2026-INIT/en/pdf
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/civil_protection/communication_on_integrated_wildfire_risk_management.pdf

CESI considers that implementation should be measured by demonstrable improvements in firefighters' safety, employment conditions and operational capacity.

In line with their resolution on trade union demands on support for the firefighting profession of September 2025[3], CESI firefighter trade union members put forward the following demands and priorities to the European Commission, Member States and the competent regional and local authorities, in accordance with their respective competences:

1. **Fire services must have sufficient permanent staff and funded workforce plans.**

Member States should translate workforce assessments into multiannual recruitment and retention plans agreed with the relevant trade unions. Plans should set risk-based minimum crew strengths, relief capacity and territorial coverage objectives, taking account of simultaneous fires, prolonged operations, training and absence. They should include dispatchers, analysts, logistics and maintenance staff, and protect routine emergency coverage when personnel are deployed elsewhere. Seasonal and voluntary support must complement stable professional staffing.

2. **Pay, secure employment and working time must reflect the demands of the profession.**

Member States and employers should negotiate adequate pay, compensation for hazardous duties and predictable contracts through the applicable collective bargaining arrangements. They must apply EU working time protections within their scope, including rest and weekly working time limits. Lawful derogations must satisfy their conditions, including compensatory rest or, exceptionally, appropriate protection. Foreseeable seasonal demand should be addressed through staffing and rotation plans. Employers should record duty and deployment time accurately and assess cumulative fatigue before reassignment.

3. **Prevention must be a properly resourced public service responsibility.**

Member States should involve fire services and their representatives in fuel management, land-use planning and the design of safe access routes, water points and evacuation arrangements, particularly at the wildland-urban interface. Prevention duties must have dedicated staffing, training and budgets. Authorities should coordinate prevention with forestry and land-management workers.

4. **Firefighters must have enforceable protection against heat, smoke and operational hazards.**

Employers must assess occupational risks and implement preventive measures in accordance with applicable law. EU level operational safety guidance, developed with firefighter unions, could cover extreme fire behaviour, escape routes, safety zones, communications failure and coordinated aerial and ground operations. Member States should incorporate such guidance into enforceable national procedures, including authority to suspend unsafe tasks and withdraw crews. Deployment plans should provide drinking

[3] https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/67911412a89ff81c0e28e4d4/69c3ab7818360693f41e7242_2025%20-%20Demands%20CESI%20firefighters_final.pdf

water, cooling, shaded rest areas, medical support and relief teams, with work and rest cycles adapted to conditions.

5. **Protective equipment and decontamination facilities must be available for every deployment.**

Employers should provide individually fitted, wildfire-appropriate protective clothing and respiratory protection selected through task-specific assessment of smoke, gases, heat and physical exertion. Equipment must be compatible with communications systems and available in sizes suited to all personnel, including women. Procurement budgets should cover maintenance, replacement sets, field decontamination, clean transport and separate storage of contaminated equipment. The European Commission should support joint testing and interoperable specifications with trade union participation; procurement must assess protection under operational conditions.

6. **Exposure monitoring must lead to prevention and occupational disease protection.**

To prevent firefighting from being carcinogenic, employers should follow records and confidential health surveillance throughout and after service for firefighters, with access to appropriate screening based on medical evidence. Member States should improve recognition and compensation of occupational diseases, including evidence-based presumptions for specified cancers where justified, rehabilitation and support for affected families. Health records must remain accessible when firefighters change employer or retire, with health data protected from discriminatory use.

7. **Mental health support and recovery must form part of operational readiness.**

Employers should provide confidential psychological support, trained peer support and rapid access to specialist care for trauma, depression and other work-related conditions, without financial barriers. Support should continue after deployment and be available to families where appropriate. Post-fire plans should include recovery time, medically supported return to work and rehabilitation. Authorities should also prevent third-party violence through effective reporting procedures, operational coordination and appropriate sanctions, with support for affected personnel.

8. **Specialist training must be continuous, paid and accessible to all personnel.**

Member States should guarantee paid initial and recurrent wildfire training, with replacement staffing so that participation does not reduce emergency cover. Training should include extreme fire behaviour, smoke and heat protection, evacuation, incident command and joint operations.

9. **Cross-border solidarity must include clear rights and responsibilities for firefighters.**

The European Commission and Member States should establish a common protection framework for personnel participating in Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) training, exercises and operations. Before departure, written arrangements should identify command responsibilities, applicable employment protections, insurance, injury and death compensation, healthcare, repatriation, accommodation and rest. Pre-positioning should be planned with unions and preserve sending services' safe staffing.

10. European response capacity must combine suitable assets with sufficient trained crews.

The European Commission and Member States should strengthen rescEU and the European Civil Protection Pool through risk-based investment in aircraft, ground teams, transport, communications and maintenance. Assets must be deployable during concurrent emergencies. Common equipment interfaces, terminology and joint exercises should enable safe cooperation, with firefighters' representatives involved in defining standards.

11. Data and technology must support safe operational decisions.

The European Commission should ensure that information from Copernicus and the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) can be used by incident commanders and frontline teams through resilient, interoperable systems. Member States should train and resource fire behaviour analysts and provide reliable access to updated terrain, weather, fuel and evacuation information. EU research funding should prioritise worker protection and operational testing of drones, warning systems and protective technologies.

12. Firefighters and their trade unions must shape implementation and funding.

Member States should establish standing consultation arrangements with firefighter unions for wildfire strategies, staffing, procurement, training and recovery plans. The European Commission should provide a structured channel for European trade unions to contribute to the further development of wildfire risk management measures.

National budgets and eligible EU programmes should support the full cost of readiness, including training, equipment upkeep and health protection. The Commission should issue a practical funding guide for fire services; Member States should secure recurrent staffing expenditure through sustainable public budgets.