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Greece: Evros wildfire dead are victims of ‘two great injustices of our times’

Reacting to the deaths of 19 people, likely migrants and refugees, on 21 and 22 August in fires affecting the Evros region, Northern Greece, Adriana Tidona, migration researcher at Amnesty International said:

“The 19 people killed by wildfires in northern Greece appear to be victims of two great injustices of our times. On the one hand, catastrophic climate change, which governments are failing to address and is worsening the scale of wildfires worldwide as rising temperatures lead to longer and more destructive fire seasons. On the other hand, the lack of access to safe and legal routes for some people on the move, and the persistence of migration management policies predicated on racialized exclusion and deadly deterrence, including racist border violence.

“Though the identities of the people killed by the fires are not known, it seems [likely that they were migrants and refugees](#) who had recently crossed the border into Greece. Because of the lack of access to safe and legal routes for people trying to reach Europe, migrants and refugees increasingly use the land borders in the Evros region to cross irregularly from Turkey into Greece. Authorities there have systematically responded with unlawful forced returns at the border, denial of the right to seek asylum and violence.

“The fires have fuelled racist rhetoric and abuses against migrants and refugees. On his Facebook account, Paraschos Christou Papadakis, an ultra-nationalist Greek MP, racist language to claim that fires had been started by migrants and refugees. A private individual was arrested, after he abducted a group of migrants and refugees in his vehicle and incited others to do the same, uploading a video of his actions online.

“Alarm Phone, an NGO, has reported that hundreds of refugees and migrants are stranded in different areas of Evros while fires blaze in the region. Amnesty International calls on the Greek authorities to urgently evacuate all those stranded in the Evros region and who are unable to move safely due to fires and to ensure that refugees and migrants who have entered into Greece irregularly can seek asylum and are not illegally forcibly returned at the border. The Greek authorities must publicly condemn and investigate any act of racist violence or speech or incitement to such behaviours, including on the part of politicians.”

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