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Hundreds dead across Europe as heatwave shatters records

Spain has recorded the highest death toll as temperatures top 40C across much of the continent, reviving memories of the deadly summer of 2003

Published 25 Jun, 2026 23:41 | Updated 26 Jun, 2026 00:45

A scorching heatwave has killed hundreds of people across Europe this week, with Spain reporting the highest death toll as temperatures surged past 40C (104F) and records were shattered across the continent.

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Spanish authorities have linked more than 200 deaths to the extreme heat, according to the country's mortality monitoring system. Germany has reported more than 20 deaths, many of them drownings as people sought relief in rivers, lakes, and pools. France has confirmed several heat-related fatalities, including children, while Italy has also reported multiple deaths as hospitals treated growing numbers of patients suffering from heatstroke and dehydration.



Parisians cool off in the fountains amid the heatwave in Paris, France, June 20, 2026. © Getty Images / Mustafa Yalcin / Anadolu

The heatwave has engulfed much of Western and Southern Europe, with Paris recording its hottest June day on record at 40.9C and Britain registering its highest June temperature ever at 36.4C. Switzerland also set a new June record, while authorities across the region issued red alerts, closed schools, canceled train services and urged residents to stay indoors during the hottest parts of the day.

Meteorologists have attributed the extreme temperatures to a persistent *“heat dome”* that has trapped hot air over Europe and prevented cooler weather systems from moving in. The conditions have been particularly dangerous in densely populated cities, where concrete and asphalt retain heat overnight, offering little relief after sunset.

The mounting death toll has revived memories of Europe's catastrophic 2003 heatwave, which is estimated to have caused tens of thousands of excess deaths

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across the continent, making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in modern European history.

Experts say Europe remains especially vulnerable because much of its housing stock was designed to retain heat during cold winters rather than keep homes cool in summer. Unlike in North America and many parts of Asia, residential air conditioning is

still relatively uncommon across much of the continent, leaving millions exposed during prolonged periods of extreme heat.

Governments have warned that the death toll is likely to rise further as the heatwave persists, and are urging people to stay hydrated, avoid outdoor activity during peak temperatures, and check on elderly relatives and other vulnerable people.

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