

KEEPING EU CITIZENS FIRE SAFE IN ALL BUILDINGS



EU MANIFESTO FOR 2024-2029

CALL
FOR A
EUROPEAN
STRATEGY





In 2024, almost 450 million citizens from across the European Union will have the opportunity to elect their representatives to the European Parliament and shape the agenda for the rest of the decade.

These EU citizens spend 90% of their time in buildings, at home, at work or for other activities, in their home country or in other EU Member States in which they freely travel for work, studies or tourism. They expect an equal level of fire safety in any European building.

Representing the European fire safety sector, we, the undersigned organisations, call for the European institutions to prioritize fire safety in buildings and to develop and promote a consistent strategy with Member States for the fire safety of all people who live and work in buildings.

The need to act

Our commitment to the safety of European citizens stands challenged by alarming statistics. Each year, the European Union witnesses nearly 5000 fire-related casualties in domestic buildings, according to cautious estimates¹. For many of these incidents, a community, business or family is affected, often for several years, sometimes for life.

Despite this worrying status quo, **existing fire risks remain perilously unmitigated and new challenges are arising to which fire safety regulations are not adapted.**

The very infrastructure many call 'home' is endangered by **obsolete electrical installations**, while 50% of accidental residential fires have an electrical source. The **furniture** and mattresses can become an inadvertent risk, limiting the escape time in the event of a fire, depending on their flammability, and are involved in 25% of fatal fires. Even basic preventive measures like **smoke alarms** aren't as ubiquitous as they should be, with only 2/3 of Member States requiring their installation in homes. A significant segment of the population is also trapped in **dilapidated homes** that are unfit for habitation and at higher fire risk.

These insufficiently mitigated existing fire risks will be further exacerbated by the European Green Deal's emphasis on decarbonising buildings through advanced innovations if fire safety is not considered. The deployment of PV panels, EV charging points and heat pumps, while central to reducing carbon emissions, introduce **new ignition risks** due to increased electrical loads or subpar installation and maintenance. **New building materials and new construction methods** aiming to achieve higher energy performance or sustainability also have an impact on fire dynamics.

Adding to this complexity is our **demographic shift**. Europe's population is ageing, resulting in a significant portion of our residents who are elderly and, in many instances, more vulnerable. Their safety needs, particularly in the context of fires, require specific attention. The same applies to people affected by energy poverty, unfit housing or disabilities, who are also more vulnerable to fires.

Furthermore, **climate change** makes the fire safety challenge more unpredictable: from drier conditions that can make environments more fire-prone to unforeseen weather patterns affecting evacuation or firefighting operations.

Finally, **fire safety is an integral part of the three pillars of sustainability** within Europe's built environment. Environmentally, building fires contribute to pollution, undermine circularity goals, and increase carbon emissions from reconstruction. Socially, they pose health risks, claim lives, disrupt communities, cause homelessness and inflict enduring psychological trauma. Economically, they strain resources, hinder business recovery, and threaten employment.

¹European Fire Safety Action Plan, European Fire Safety Alliance, 2020



Why the European Union must lead

We believe that the European Union must play an important **coordinating role** in fire safety as it impacts and is impacted by several of its core objectives.

The **free movement of EU citizens** is one of the fundamental EU freedoms. Every person, whether they are a resident, a tourist, or an Erasmus student, deserves and expects a consistent level of protection and safety wherever they might be within our borders.

Moreover, striving to meet the objectives of the **EU Green Deal**, the European Union needs to properly address the emerging safety risks linked to electrification solutions and other modifications of the built environment. This is needed to avoid slowing down the deployment of innovative decarbonisation and sustainability solutions in EU buildings.

The EU's involvement in the field of fire safety is also deeply interwoven with principles surrounding the **Single Market**. The European Union has a responsibility to ensure that products within this market are not only efficient and affordable but also safe. Overseeing product safety and market surveillance is a significant facet of the EU's role.

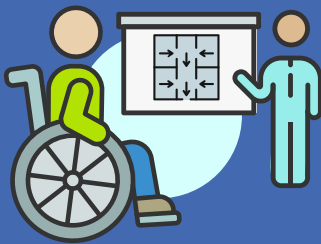
Furthermore, through the collation of **data**, shared **research**, and exchange of experience, the EU offers a unique perspective that will enrich and strengthen the development of knowledge in the field of fire safety and help address common challenges across Member States.

The undersigned organisations do not want to challenge the **principle of subsidiarity** in the domain of building codes: Member States should therefore remain free to design their fire safety regulations by considering the local specificities in terms of building design solutions, materials, use patterns and climate. However, we believe that action on fire safety in buildings goes beyond building codes. The European Union can support Member States by having a coordinating role on fire safety to realise its objectives related to its shared and supporting competences in the fields of tourism, energy, environment, human health, and consumer protection.

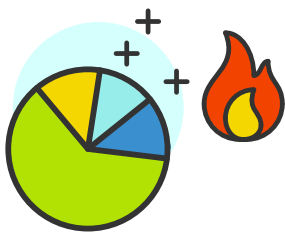


A strategy for the safety of people in buildings

For all the above reasons, we call on the European Union to develop a **FIRE SAFETY STRATEGY** to support Member States, coordinate action and supplement their actions when needed, with the following aims to:



Amplify fire **safety awareness and prevention to the general population**, with a special emphasis on the vulnerable demographics. This involves integrating fire safety measures into the EU's social protection frameworks related to energy poverty, elderly care, disability and education.



Standardize and consolidate **EU fire statistics**, ensuring reliability and comparability, drawing insights from the EUFireStat pilot project.



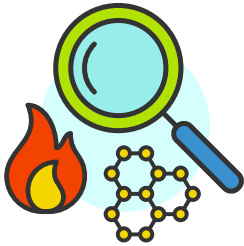
Foster fire **safety competences and skills** by endorsing educational initiatives, promoting certifications, and embedding fire safety within the broader EU skills agenda.



Champion **research** in fire safety in buildings and ensure that fire safety is an integral component of research focusing on the energy transition and sustainable innovations.



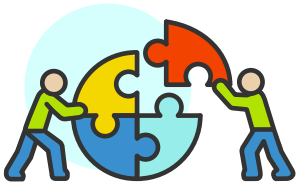
Ensure fire safety is fully considered in **sustainable building and energy transition policies**, ensuring its integration in tools supporting the renovation wave and other legislation.



Develop a comprehensive approach to identify gaps and needs on **fire safety standards and test methods**, particularly in relation to furniture and to different ignition scenarios in buildings created by new sustainable solutions.



Consider essential **fire safety requirements** (e.g. obligatory smoke alarms in all residential buildings) to ensure safe movement across the EU with consistent safety standards, inspection regimes and information.



Enhance safety by reinforcing **market surveillance** for products and compliance mechanisms for buildings, in a collaborative approach among EU states.



Strengthen the **EU Fire Information Exchange Platform (FIEP)** as a nexus for national authorities to disseminate knowledge, exchange best practice, and collaborate effectively with the Commission on the aforementioned objectives.



Secure appropriate training, equipment and availability of **firefighters**, who play a very important role in fire prevention and constitute the last line of defence when other protective measures in building fail.



#KEEPEUFIRESAFE

