It is only July, and Europe is already enduring its second extreme heatwave in two months. Temperatures have surged past 44°C across parts of the continent. France has placed 72 of its 96 departments on red alert. Spain has recorded over 100 heat-related deaths in May alone. In the United Kingdom, record-breaking temperatures are closing schools, straining power grids, and overwhelming hospitals. This is not an anomaly. It is a preview.

For decades, scientists have warned that human-driven climate change would make extreme heat more frequent, more intense, and more deadly. Europe, warming at roughly twice the global average, was always going to be on the front line. The uncomfortable truth is that the summers Europeans once knew are gone. Extreme heat is no longer an exception; it is the baseline. The real question now is not whether another heatwave will come, but whether Europe is prepared to survive the ones that will.

And yet, despite the mounting evidence, extreme heat is still not treated like the disaster it is. According to the World Health Organization, heat kills over 175,000 people in Europe every year—more than any other climate-related hazard. Still, governments respond to heatwaves as if they are temporary inconveniences rather than systemic threats. Emergency measures are improvised, fragmented, and often underfunded. There is no unified, continent-wide response equal to the scale of the risk.

This neglect is not just a policy failure; it is a structural one. Europe’s cities were built for a climate that no longer exists. Concrete-heavy urban landscapes trap heat, pushing temperatures several degrees higher than surrounding areas. Buildings designed to retain warmth now act like ovens in summer. Infrastructure, from transport to housing, is misaligned with a rapidly changing environment.

There are signs of adaptation. Paris plans to plant 170,000 trees. Marseille is redesigning public spaces for shade and cooling. Some cities are experimenting with reflective materials and revised building codes. But these efforts, while necessary, are not sufficient. They

address the symptoms without confronting the underlying cause: a carbon-intensive economy that continues to drive the crisis.

Europe's emissions remain significantly above the global average. Transport systems still favor cheap flights over trains. New buildings are constructed without adequate climate resilience. Cooling centers, shaded corridors, and outreach to vulnerable populations remain exceptions rather than standard practice. Even where heat action plans exist, they often lack legal force and adequate funding.

Individual actions—flying less, eating less meat—matter, but they cannot replace systemic change. Without rapid, large-scale emissions reductions and coordinated adaptation strategies, the cycle will continue. Each summer will bring higher temperatures, greater strain on infrastructure, and more preventable deaths.

The European Union is preparing a climate resilience strategy due by the end of 2026, promising stronger coordination and binding measures. It is a necessary step. But the gap between planning and reality is widening. The current heatwave is not waiting for policy timelines. It is already here, reshaping lives and exposing vulnerabilities.

Europe is not simply experiencing extreme weather. It is entering a different climate era altogether. The challenge ahead is not just to respond to heatwaves, but to redesign societies around the conditions that now define them. Governance, infrastructure, and economic systems must evolve as quickly as the climate itself.

Because the longer Europe treats extreme heat as a seasonal crisis, the more it will become a permanent catastrophe.