

MERCOSUR FILES

Deforestation in the Mercosur region has been a source of friction in the negotiations of the EU-Mercosur trade agreement, and one of the main reasons for stopping the ratification process during Bolsonaro's mandate. Under the new Brazilian government, deforestation has decreased in the Amazon, although in July 2024 the deforestation level reached a higher level than the same month last year. At the same time, forest fires have reached new record levels in 2024. Simultaneously, recent data indicates that violences against Indigenous peoples have also worsened, together with attempts to weaken their rights with new legislations pushed by policy-makers linked to the agribusiness. Despite some improvement on environmental protections, the conditions to conclude a sustainable trade deal with Mercosur are still not met.



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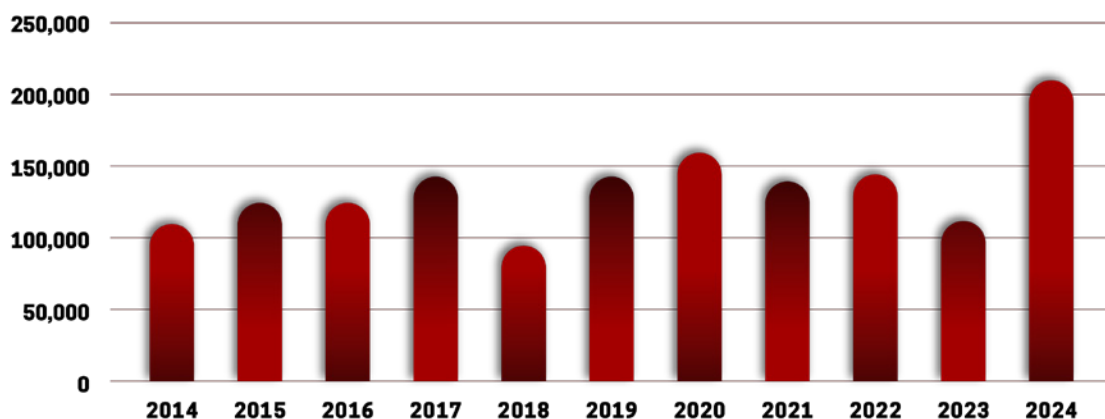


FOREST FIRES IN BRAZIL SURGE TO A 14-YEAR PEAK

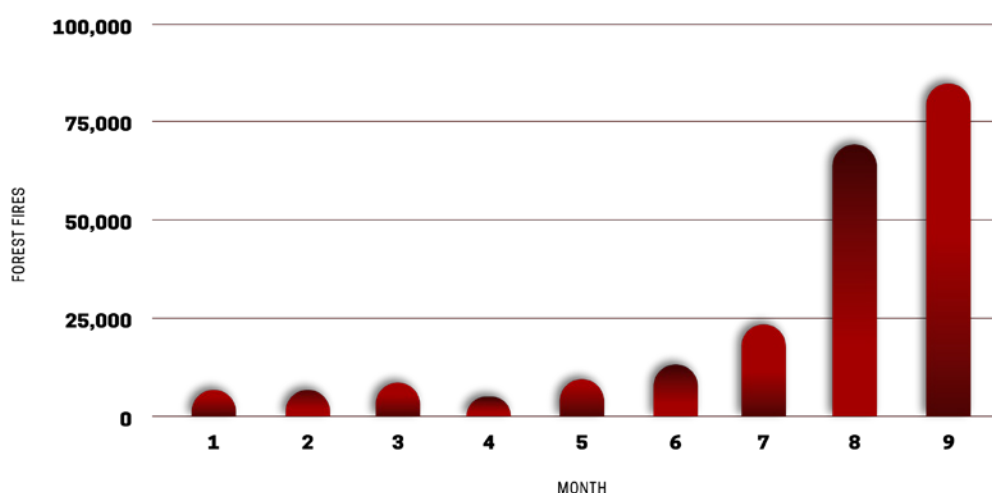
Despite positive developments like reduced deforestation in the Amazon and renewed environmental policies since last year, Brazil faces a bleak environmental situation as a sharp increase in forest fires threatens its recent progress. **From January to September 2024, the number of fires surged to its highest level since 2010.**¹ The area burned in Brazil between January and August 2024 was **116% larger** than recorded in 2023, reaching 11 million hectares.² Roughly 666 sq km (257 sq miles) of jungle were cleared in July 2024, 33% higher than the 500 square km for the same month in 2023, according to preliminary data announced by the Environment Ministry and Science Ministry³.

FOREST FIRES IN THE LAST TEN YEARS

Fire alerts from January to September



FOREST FIRES IN 2024 BY MONTH



The majority of these fires occurred in the Amazon, underscoring the severity of the situation in the region. Alone, they accounted for half of the total in Brazil.⁴

Fires in the Amazon are a dire signal of its destruction. Almost all fires in the Amazon are human-caused, as some rural producers continue to use burning to prepare land for agriculture and livestock.⁵

This increase in forest fires is also being exacerbated by a **historic drought, the worst since records began in 1950**. During this year, 58% of the country's territory was already affected by drought, with about one-third experiencing severe conditions. The outlook for the future is even more concerning, as the droughts are becoming more frequent and severe.⁶⁷ Those fires are also a **direct result of global warming**, as it has increased the likelihood of fires in the Amazon by up to 20 times.⁸

Despite a rise in forest fires, deforestation in the Amazon continues to show improvement since the years of Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, when rates reached alarming levels. Between January and September, alerts have decreased by 21.58% since 2023 and 60.52% compared to the last year of Bolsonaro's administration but in July 2024 the deforestation level has increased again.

The destruction of the Cerrado biome in 2024 shows stability compared to Bolsonaro's last year in office, without significant improvement in the threats that the biome suffers, especially due to the expansion of soy plantations for the international market in the area.⁹

Photo: Fernando Martinho

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK

Despite the election of a government more favorable to the Indigenous cause in 2022, disputes over their rights across the three branches of government resulted in a continued pattern of violence and violations against them and their territories in the last year. The institutional environment of attacks on Indigenous peoples rights led to violent actions against communities and a continued high rate of homicides, suicides, and child mortality among these peoples. **During 2023, at least 208 murders of Indigenous people happened in the country, a 15.5% increase from 2022**. They were especially prevalent in Amazonian states like Roraima and Amazonas.¹⁰

While violence against Indigenous peoples persists, **the National Congress appears to be at the forefront of exacerbating environmental degradation and undermining the rights of traditional communities**. The Legislature remains the main source of threats to them in Brazil, with a parliament largely composed of representatives linked to agribusiness. A set of 28 legislative proposals, dubbed the "Destruction Bundle,"¹¹ includes two constitutional amendments that jeopardize Indigenous rights in the country. One of them assigns the responsibility for demarcating Indigenous lands to Congress, which would, in practice, stall the creation of new Indigenous territories.¹² The other proposal incorporates the "Marco Temporal" thesis into the Constitution, a measure that restricts their right and that has already been ruled out by the Supreme Court.¹³ This measure could lead to **many Indigenous peoples losing their territories, as at least 867 Indigenous lands have administrative disputes over them that could be affected by this decision**.¹⁴

In April, Supreme Court Justice Gilmar Mendes set up a conciliation chamber to address the Marco Temporal issue, bringing together representatives from Indigenous communities and other stakeholders.¹⁵ However, Indigenous movements have been critical of the process, deeming it illegitimate, and have subsequently withdrawn their participation.¹⁶

ENDNOTES

- 1 https://terrabrasilis.dpi.inpe.br/queimadas/situacao-atual/estatisticas/estatisticas_paises/
- 2 <https://ipam.org.br/nota-tecnica/>
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Photo: Avener Prado

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