

WORLD EUROPE 5 MIN READ

# Unanswered phones and painful questions haunt Swiss resort as police open criminal inquiry against bar managers

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This photograph shows fences displayed near Le Constellation bar where a fire ripped through during New Year's Eve celebrations in the Alpine ski resort town of Crans-Montana on January 2, 2026. (*Maxime Schmid/AFP/Getty Images*)



**Crans-Montana, Switzerland —** The flames of Le Constellation touched far too many young people on New Year's Eve.

Even so, the scars of that night already run much wider than the bar.

In the days since the blaze, locals told CNN they were lost in the what ifs of that night: last-minute changes of plans, choosing to celebrate outside the crowded bar or with family instead of friends.

“It should’ve been us”; “I was supposed to go too”; “My siblings were there the night before,” locals told us in the days after the fire.

Now, those who were texting with presumed victims just hours before the disaster are glued to their phones: locked in a desperate wait for any information about friends who simply don’t reply any more.

On Saturday, Swiss police announced they had opened an investigation into the managers of the bar for negligent manslaughter, negligent bodily harm and negligent arson.

Swiss police also identified four of the victims including two young women, aged 21 and 16, and two young men, 18 and 16.

In a bar popular with teenagers, there’s a growing realization in Crans-Montana that many of the dead are some of the youngest in this community of locals and holidaymakers.



Police officers control the entrance to the bar Le Constellation where a fire ripped through the venue during New Year's celebrations in the Alpine ski resort town of Crans-Montana killing around 40 people and injuring more than 100 others, in Crans-Montana on January 2, 2026. *(Maxime Schmid/AFP/Getty Images)*

For their friends – children themselves – the events of that night, beamed around social networks via horrifying videos of fiery panic, are all they talk about.

“We ask what we would have done in their place,” 17-year-old Leonor Marques told CNN. “We only speak of that.”

“I feel like even if we want to turn the page it’s impossible,” she said, “The subject comes around and around.”

## In the dark

Friday morning, as journalists and mourners gathered before Le Constellation, one scene captured the raw emotion still coursing through this small community.

A father, his face soaked with tears, crumpled to his knees as he neared the bar.

After a desperate scrabble for information, through two dark nights and a difficult day, he still didn't know if his son's body may lie in Le Constellation, his brother told CNN.

According to Swiss officials, a handful of patients in hospital from the fire have still not yet been identified.



Mourners gather near the site of a fire that ripped through a bar during New Year's Eve celebrations in the Alpine ski resort town of Crans-Montana killing around 40 people and injuring more than 100 others, in Crans-Montana on January 2, 2026. (*Maxime Schmid/AFP/Getty Images*)

Amid the unbearable wait for information, the days swing between hope and despair, the teenage cousin of one young man still missing since the fire said.

"I mean, there's probably no chance" he's alive, she told CNN after nearly two full days of no news of his fate. She asked to remain anonymous out of respect for her family.

For Leonor Marques, 17, who is still waiting on news of two friends she knew were at Le Constellation on Wednesday night, not knowing their fate is the most difficult.

“I feel useless like I can do nothing,” she told CNN from Crans-Montana, “I don’t know if they’re alive dead, doing well or badly. I can’t do anything. I can do absolutely nothing.”

Amid the tragedy, she said she had to take some comfort in knowing that two of her friends were in medically induced comas in a Lausanne hospital.

“That’s something,” she said.

Surgical resident Amandine Chavanon, 25, holidaying in Crans-Montana was woken by her mother after her teenage brother called them from outside Le Constellation.



This photograph shows the entrance of the bar Le Constellation where a fire ripped through the venue during New Year's Eve celebrations in the Alpine ski resort town of Crans-Montana killing around 40 people and injuring more than 100 others, in Crans-Montana on January 2, 2026.  
*(Maxime Schmid/AFP/Getty Images)*

Rushing to the scene to help, she spent hours triaging badly burned victims, offering life-saving aid alongside first responders and passersby.

Focused on treating patients on the floor of the bank where she was inserting IV drips and calming burned survivors, identifying them wasn't their priority.

"Evacuate, evacuate, evacuate" was what we were thinking, she told CNN, even as some of the first responders tried to keep track of the names of the dozens of wounded teenagers.

Stumbling out of the bar, she said many of the young revellers, "didn't really know what's happening."

"I had a girl. I remember she was – the whole face was burnt, and she saw me, and she said, 'I'm going home.' I just took her, and I said, 'You're not going home.'"

Working a New Year's Eve nightshift at a nearby hospital, doctor friends recounted to Chavanon having to turn away distraught parents looking for their children as they struggled to deal with the influx of patients.

"It was just saving, saving, saving," she said.

## Brewing questions

As pictures emerged from the last moments in Le Constellation before the fire took hold, revellers can be seen dancing beneath a shower of sparks, flying out of champagne bottles lifted inches from the ceiling, coated in insulation foam.



An image shared on social media appears to show what could be the start of the fire at Le Constellation in Crans-Montana, Switzerland. A portion of this image was blurred by CNN to protect identities. *(From social media)*

In video shot likely moments later, young people dance, laugh and film the flames as a young man bats in vain at the flames with a towel.

With authorities directing their ongoing investigation at the role of the sparklers, testimony from survivors and those that rushed to help is beginning to fill in the picture of that fateful night.

Paolo Campolo, a local resident being hailed for pulling revellers out of the burning bar, said that he had to force a rear door of the bar to free people trapped inside.

CNN spoke to multiple teenagers, who said they had visited Le Constellation many times and that a rear exit to the bar was usually locked.

The French co-owner of the bar told Swiss newspaper **Tribune de Genève** Friday that the establishment had been inspected “three times in 10 years.”

“Everything was done according to the rules,” Jacques Moretti said.

CNN previously reached out to both Moretti and co-owner Jessica Anne Jeanne Moretti through their businesses.

In Crans-Montana, news of the living and the dead feels like the priority for many.

Processing this disaster is not yet on people’s minds.

On Thursday evening, a father walked past the shrouded fences that now mark Le Constellation, his toddler perched on his shoulders.

“What happened there?” she asked him, his face contorting as he searched for his reply, the weight of the tragedy too much to distil.

“An accident, my dear,” he answered.



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