

World Food
Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

El Niño Outlook: May 2026

2026 May



The Forecast

82% probability of El Niño emergence between May and July 2026, with an upward trajectory towards a strong event

El Niño Comparison

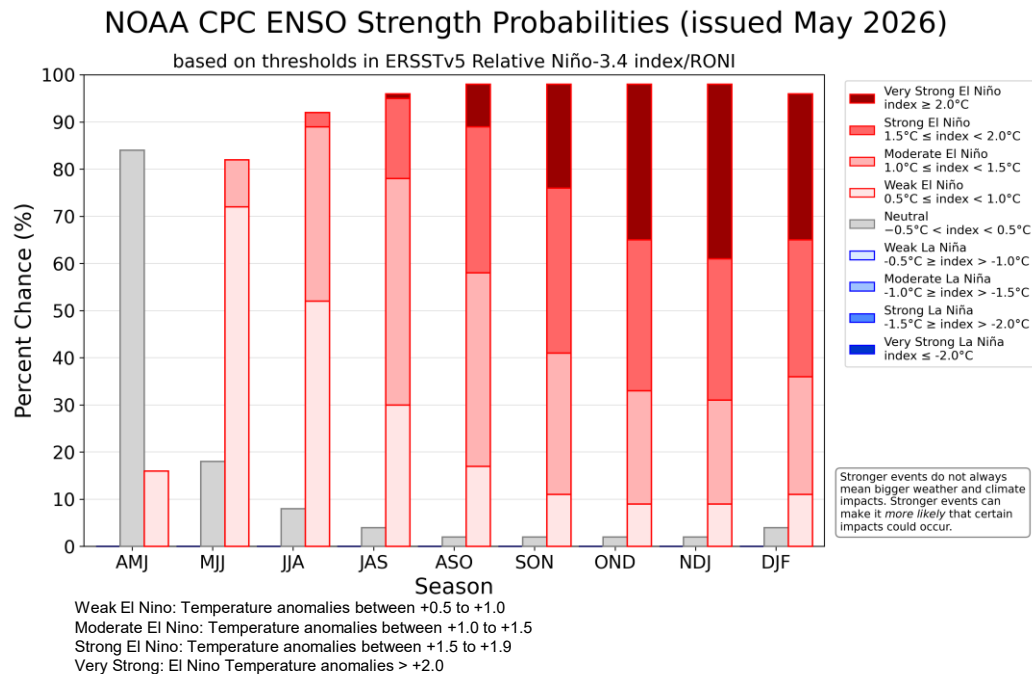
Stronger and more widespread forecasted Pacific warming than in the 2023-24 El Niño

Short Term Threat

A critical threat to the Northern Hemisphere growing season, especially for rainfed farming systems

El Niño Outlook – May 2026

Forecasts indicate increasing likelihood that El Niño conditions will develop between May and July 2026



- El Niño likely to develop May–July 2026 (~82%) and continue through Northern Hemisphere winter 2026-27 (96%)
- El Niño events tends to reach their **peak between Nov and Jan**
- **Rising likelihood** of strong event, not yet confirmed across all forecasting centres.

What are the **climate impacts** of El Niño?



Tends to **redistribute rainfall**, causing flooding in some regions and drought in others



Raise global temperatures, often contributing to the warmest years on record



Increase the likelihood of climate extremes, such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, and wildfires, and typically suppresses Atlantic tropical cyclone activity while enhancing activity in the Pacific

Does **El Niño strength** influence the impact?



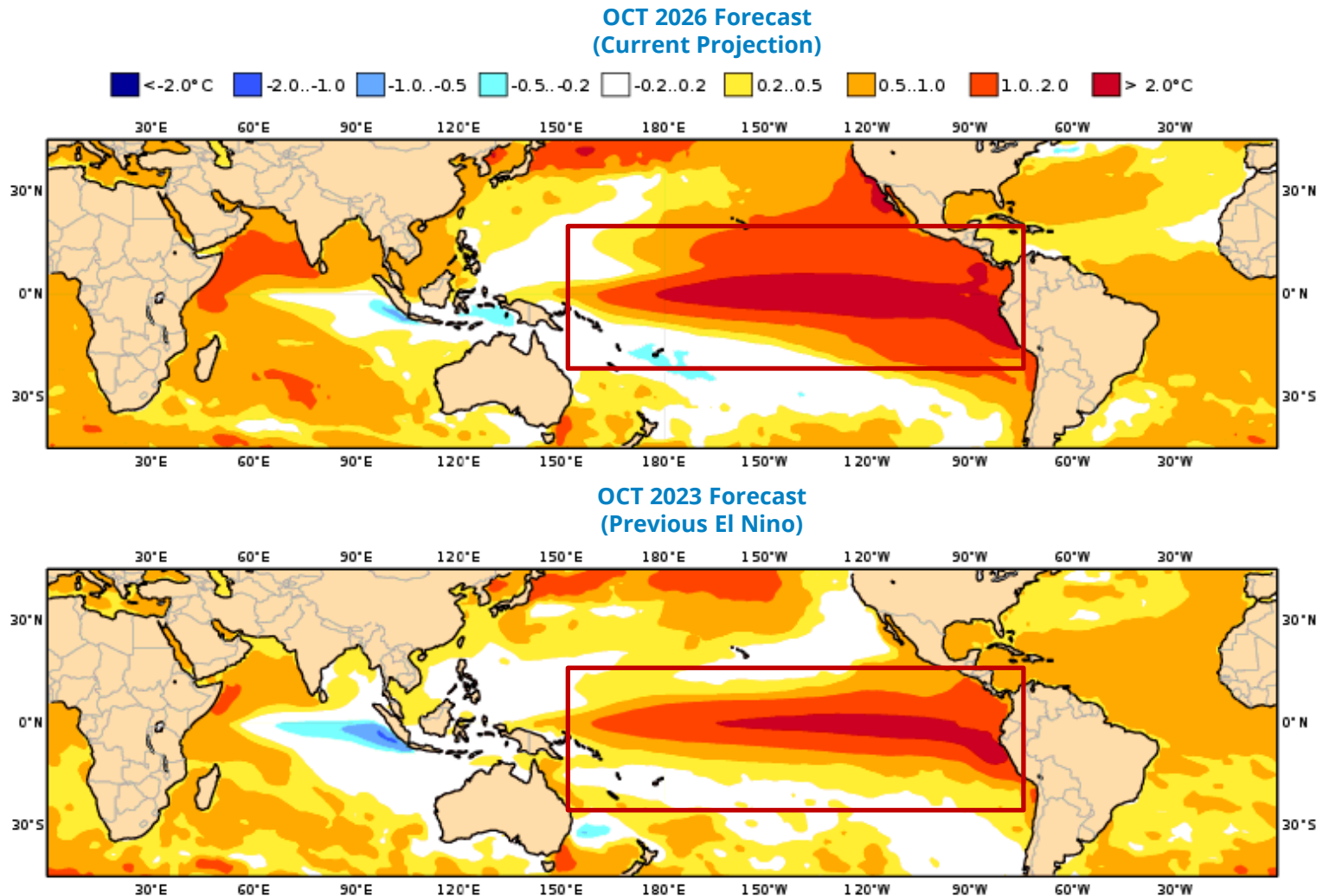
The **relationship between El Niño strength and impacts is not linear**, where even weak events have resulted in severe impact



Stronger events **do not always translate into greater weather or climate impacts**, but they do make certain impacts **more likely to occur**. ENSO is only one of many factors that can influence seasonal weather and climate.

Is this the onset of a strong El Niño?

Aea surface temperatures anomalies are forecasted to be both more intense and more widespread



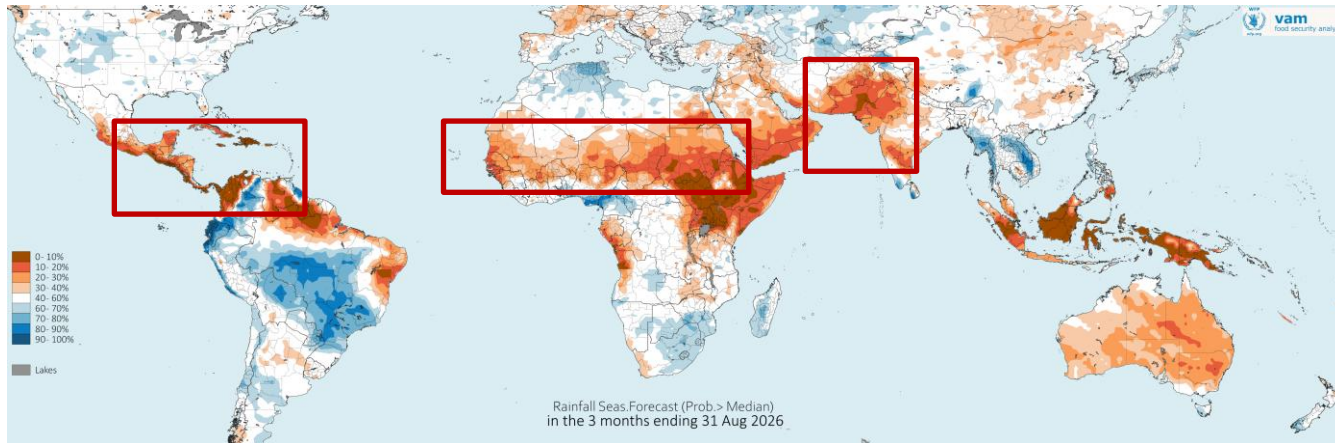
Sea surface temperatures (SST) have increased significantly over the past weeks, and further warming is likely.

A comparison of C3S forecasts for October 2023 (the previous El Niño) and 2026 indicates that, this year, positive SST anomalies in the Pacific may be both **more widespread and more intense**.

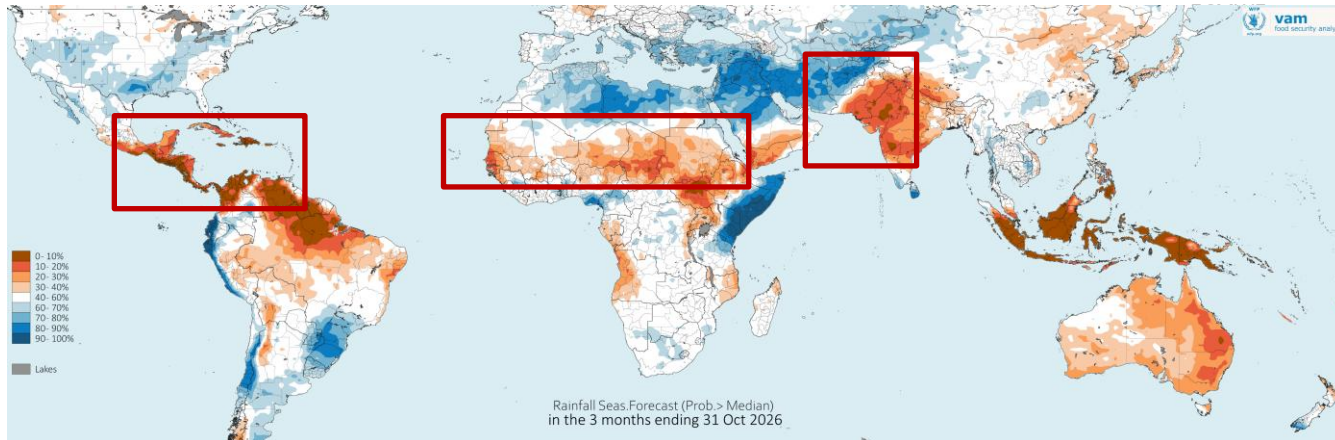
Forecasts in the coming months will be critical to confirm whether this trend will persist and to better understand whether the current El Niño will develop into a strong event.

Northern Hemisphere Crop Growing Season

Forecasts confirm conditions consistent with typical El Niño patterns



Source:



Rainfall forecast for Jun–Aug 2026 (above) and Aug–Oct 2026 (below) as the likelihood of exceeding the long-term median. Blue (orange) shades for likely wetter (drier) than usual condition.

Crop growing seasons are starting across the Northern Hemisphere, with harvests expected in autumn.

El Niño conditions typically bring drier-than-average weather to Central America, the Caribbean, northern South America, the Sahel–Ethiopia belt, and parts of India and Pakistan, thereby increasing the risk of below-average agricultural production

Current forecasts align with El Niño-like patterns

Ongoing monitoring will be essential to assess evolving conditions and impacts on agriculture and food security.

El Niño : Mapping 12 Months Trajectory of Climatic Disruptions

PEAK PHASE

JUNE JULY AUGUST SEPTEMBER OCTOBER NOVEMBER DECEMBER JANUARY FEBRUARY MARCH APRIL MAY

Sahel, Sudans, Ethiopia
 South Asia
 Central and N.Southern America
 Caribbean

Central and N.Southern America
 Caribbean
 Southern Africa
 South-East Asia

Southern Africa
 South-East Asia

Horn of Africa
 Central Asia
 MENA

Central Asia
 MENA

