

El Niño 2026–2027: Strengthening government systems and capacities to reduce disaster risks for children

Executive brief for GPD Directors and Cross-Cutting Team Leaders

Date: August 17, 2026

Executive summary

The El Niño cycle 2026–2027 arrives at a moment of exceptional child vulnerability: **1.1 billion children**, nearly half of the world's children, are already exposed to three or more climate hazards¹.

- **A strong El Niño event is already underway and is likely to become very strong.** NOAA declared its onset on 11 June 2026 and now gives a more than 90 per cent probability of a very strong event in the coming autumn and winter, with a 69 per cent chance of a historic event – exceeding all El Niño events since 1950 – in October–December 2026². WMO's latest seasonal update projects intensification to peak around November 2026³. Against exceptionally high global ocean and land surface temperatures, impacts could be more severe than in previous cycles and continue well into 2027.
- **Children will bear a disproportionate share of the impacts.** El Niño increases the risks of infrastructure damage, malnutrition, diseases, water scarcity, and displacement in the wake of extreme weather events around the world. It places pressure on household incomes and disrupts health, nutrition, education and child protection services. Girls face heightened risks of increased caregiving burdens, school dropout and gender-based violence. During the 2023–2024 El Niño cycle, almost 300,000 children were at risk of severe acute malnutrition in six southern African countries⁴. Following poor 2026 cropping seasons in the Sahel and the Greater Horn, nutrition caseloads there are expected to peak early to mid-2027, while in southern Africa, caseloads would build later, after the April 2027 harvest.
- **The El Niño pattern is being compounded by global economic pressures.** The 2026 Middle East conflict and disruption to the Strait of Hormuz have driven up fuel, fertilizer and staple food prices. Combined with El Niño-related production losses after flood and drought events, this could

¹UNICEF, Children's Climate Risk Report 2026 (June 2026): <https://www.unicef.org/reports/childrens-climate-risk-report-2026>

²NOAA Climate Prediction Center, ENSO Diagnostic Discussion (9 July and 13 August 2026): https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/enso_advisory/ensodisc.shtml

³WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update (August to October 2026), prepared 20 July 2026: https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/global-seasonal-climate-update/gscu-as02026?access-token=XrD3ZrDjcY8wXIN3EPxcKbmcGJqHP_PDnCjZaWvX-wk

⁴UNICEF ESA, Almost 300,000 children threatened by severe acute malnutrition in six drought-affected countries (2024): <https://www.unicef.org/esa/press-releases/almost-300000-children-threatened-severe-acute-malnutrition-six-drought-affected>

push up to 45 million additional people into acute food insecurity⁵.

- **UNICEF's priority is to act before El Niño impacts escalate.** Over the short term, this includes disaster preparedness, readiness to respond and anticipatory action (AA) for predictable climate extremes, and direct service delivery where government response systems are overwhelmed. Over the long term, this must also involve the strengthening of national systems to anticipate, prepare for, and reduce the impacts of extreme weather events that follow in the wake of the El Niño phenomenon, with strong participation of, and accountability to, affected communities.
- **Investments in Disaster Risk Reduction that are made across social sectors can protect children in future El Niño cycles.** El Niño is a recurring and predictable phenomenon and can be forecasted months in advance. Early-warning triggers, anticipatory actions, shock-responsive social protection and cash assistance, evacuation plans, trained social service workers, risk communication, community feedback mechanisms, pre-arranged crisis financing and pre-positioned emergency supplies will reduce impacts in 2026–2027 and strengthen preparedness for future cycles. The investment case is well established: UNDRR's Global Assessment Report 2025 puts direct disaster losses at around USD 202 billion a year – more than USD 2.3 trillion once cascading and ecosystem impacts are counted – while every dollar invested in risk reduction and prevention can save up to USD 15 in post-disaster recovery⁶.

Alignment with EMOPS: This brief was prepared by the Global Climate & Environment Practice, in consultation with UNICEF's global thematic practices and cross-sectoral programmes. It complements a forthcoming EMOPS briefing note on priority geographies, disaster preparedness gaps and funding needs. The Climate & Environment Practice and Resilience team in GPD coordinate closely with the EMOPS/RAPS team to ensure alignment of all El Niño-related briefing notes that are under circulation in UNICEF.

Alignment within the Global Programme Division: This brief draws on sectoral programme guidance and priorities developed across GPD.

⁵ PEAR inter-agency briefing note, El Niño 2026 to 27 outlook and humanitarian implications (draft, June 2026). Unpublished; available on request; figures may be revised

⁶ UNDRR, Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2025: Resilience Pays – Financing and Investing for our Future (May 2025); <https://www.undrr.org/gar/gar2025>

1. The forecast: what is coming and when

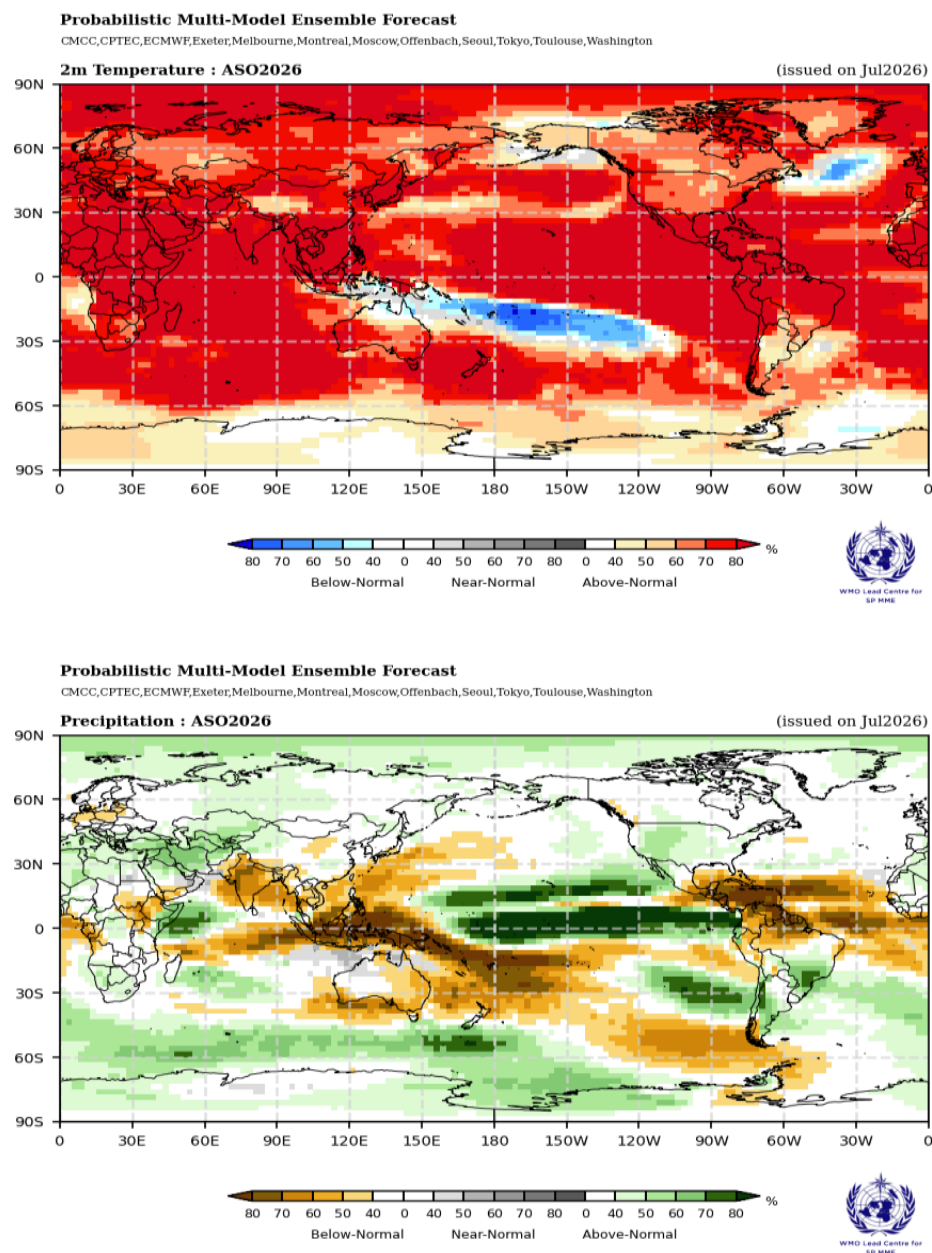


Figure 1. Probabilistic forecasts of surface air temperature (top) and precipitation (bottom) for the season August- October 2026. The tercile category with the highest forecast probability is indicated by shaded areas. The most likely category for below-normal, above-normal, and near-normal is depicted in blue, red, and grey shadings respectively for temperature, and orange, green and grey shadings respectively for precipitation. White areas indicate equal chances for all categories in both cases. The baseline period is 1993–2009. WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update, multi-model ensemble of WMO global producing centres⁷.

⁷ WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update (August to October 2026), prepared 20 July 2026: https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/global-seasonal-climate-update/gscu-aso2026?access-token=XrD3ZrDjcY8wXIN3EPxcKbmcGJqHP_PDnCjZaWvX-wk

El Niño is underway. It is the warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO), a recurring climate pattern that refers to a warming of the ocean surface in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean near the equator that alters rainfall patterns, temperatures and weather extremes around the world. Although impacts vary by region, El Niño can intensify droughts, floods, extreme heat and storms. In May 2026, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) estimated an approximately 80 per cent probability of El Niño developing between June and August⁸. On 11 June, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued an El Niño Advisory, confirming its onset⁹. In its latest update, NOAA also assesses a 97 per cent chance that El Niño will persist through early spring 2027; its 13 August update further raises the probability of a very strong event to more than 90 per cent for the coming autumn and winter, with a 69 per cent chance of a historic event exceeding all events since 1950 in October–December¹⁰. The WMO update, produced with the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), provides the principal international reference for ENSO forecasts.

On 3 July, WMO publicly confirmed the outlook and announced increased climate-information, coordination and early-warning support across the United Nations system, including briefings for humanitarian agencies¹¹. Its Global Seasonal Climate Update for August–October 2026, prepared on 20 July, forecasts a seasonal-average Niño 3.4 index anomaly of approximately 2.9 °C (relative to a 1993–2009 baseline), with monthly values reaching about 3.4 °C in October and intensification peaking in November; the narrow spread among forecast systems reflects high confidence. A positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is also expected to develop over the same period, which would further amplify flood risk in East Africa during the October–December short rains and deepen drought risk across the Maritime Continent¹².

This event is unfolding in an exceptionally high-risk context. El Niño is developing against the warmest global climate baseline on record: 2024 was the warmest year ever measured and global ocean and land temperatures in 2026 remain at record highs, which amplifies both drought where rains fail and flooding where El Niño concentrates rainfall¹³. The 2026 Middle East conflict and disruption to the Strait of Hormuz are adding further pressure, with FAO and World Bank commodity data showing benchmark fertilizer (urea) prices up around 46 per cent month-on-month and global food prices up around 5 per cent in the first two months of the disruption, with effects expected to persist into 2028¹⁴.

⁸ WMO El Niño/La Niña Update (May 2026), full publication: https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/el-ninola-nina-updates/el-ninola-nina-update-may-2026?access-token=oDf4xUTmtnv1U1pNBSswuGJa6fgGkurlSg6lo4u2_NM

⁹ NOAA Climate Prediction Center, El Niño Advisory and ENSO Diagnostic Discussion (June and July 2026): https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/enso_advisory/ensodisc.shtml

¹⁰ NOAA Climate Prediction Center, ENSO Diagnostic Discussion (13 August 2026): https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/enso_advisory/ensodisc.shtml

¹¹ WMO press release, El Niño is forecast to intensify, increasing likelihood of extreme weather (3 July 2026): <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/el-nino-forecast-intensify-increasing-likelihood-of-extreme-weather>

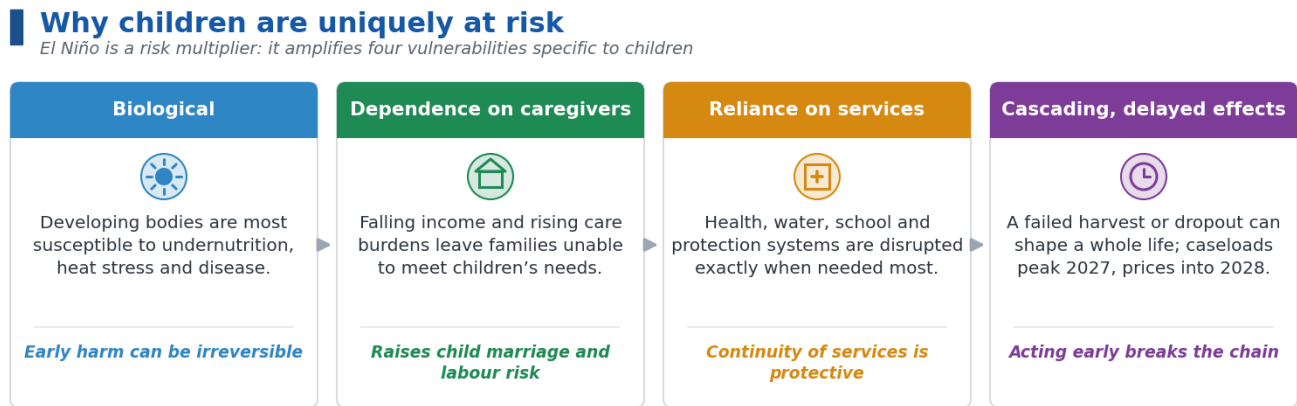
¹² WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update (August to October 2026), prepared 20 July 2026: https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/global-seasonal-climate-update/gscu-aso2026?access-token=XrD3ZrDjcY8wXIN3EPxcKbmcGJqhP_PDnCjZaWwX-wk

¹³ WMO, State of the Global Climate 2024 (2025): <https://wmo.int/publication-series/state-of-global-climate>

¹⁴ FAO, Global agrifood implications of the 2026 conflict in the Middle East (2026): <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/67a1fe95-98f2-4f23-8be7-99491bfd8343>; World Bank, Commodity Markets Outlook and commodity data blog (April to May 2026), fertiliser and food price effects of the Strait of Hormuz disruption: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/commodity-markets>

The window for disaster preparedness is now. Impacts will build unevenly across regions and could continue well into 2027. Investments in disaster preparedness can still be made before the October 2026 peak seasons: activating early-warning triggers, pre-positioning supplies, pre-arranging crisis financing and making social protection systems ready to provide support to affected populations. Longer-term investments in climate-resilient services, risk governance and adaptation planning should follow through 2027, so that countries can face future ENSO cycles in a better prepared state.

2. Why children are more at risk from El Niño



Source: UNICEF Global Climate and Environment Practice, based on UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Report 2026.

UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Report 2026 finds that 1.1 billion children, nearly half of all children worldwide, are already exposed to at least three overlapping climate hazards. The most common combination is **drought, extreme heat and heatwaves**, while **flood exposure** is also widespread and can increase where El Niño brings heavier rainfall. El Niño will therefore affect many children whose families, communities and essential services are already under severe strain¹⁵.

Girls and children with disabilities face heightened risks across all impact pathways. Climate shocks increase girls' care and water-collection burdens, disrupt schooling and heighten gender-based violence and child marriage. During the 2020–2023 Horn of Africa drought – five consecutive failed rainy seasons coinciding with a multi-year La Niña, the opposite phase of the ENSO cycle – child marriage rose by 119 per cent in affected regions¹⁶. Globally, 47.8 million more women than men face food insecurity¹⁷.

Children with disabilities face 40–70 per cent higher household costs and greater malnutrition risks. In Turkana, Kenya, 54 per cent of children with disabilities were found to be malnourished in a 2015 study conducted amid the county's chronic drought conditions, compared with one third of children without

¹⁵ UNICEF, Children's Climate Risk Report 2026 (June 2026): <https://www.unicef.org/reports/childrens-climate-risk-report-2026>

¹⁶ UNICEF ESA, Child marriage on the rise in the Horn of Africa as drought crisis intensifies (June 2022): <https://www.unicef.org/esa/press-releases/child-marriage-rise-horn-africa-drought-crisis-intensifies>

¹⁷ UN Women, How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected (2022): <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>

disabilities¹⁸. El Niño preparedness must therefore use gender and disability analysis, disaggregated data and meaningful participation by women, adolescent girls and persons with disabilities and routinely use sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data.

3. Where El Niño-related risks concentrate

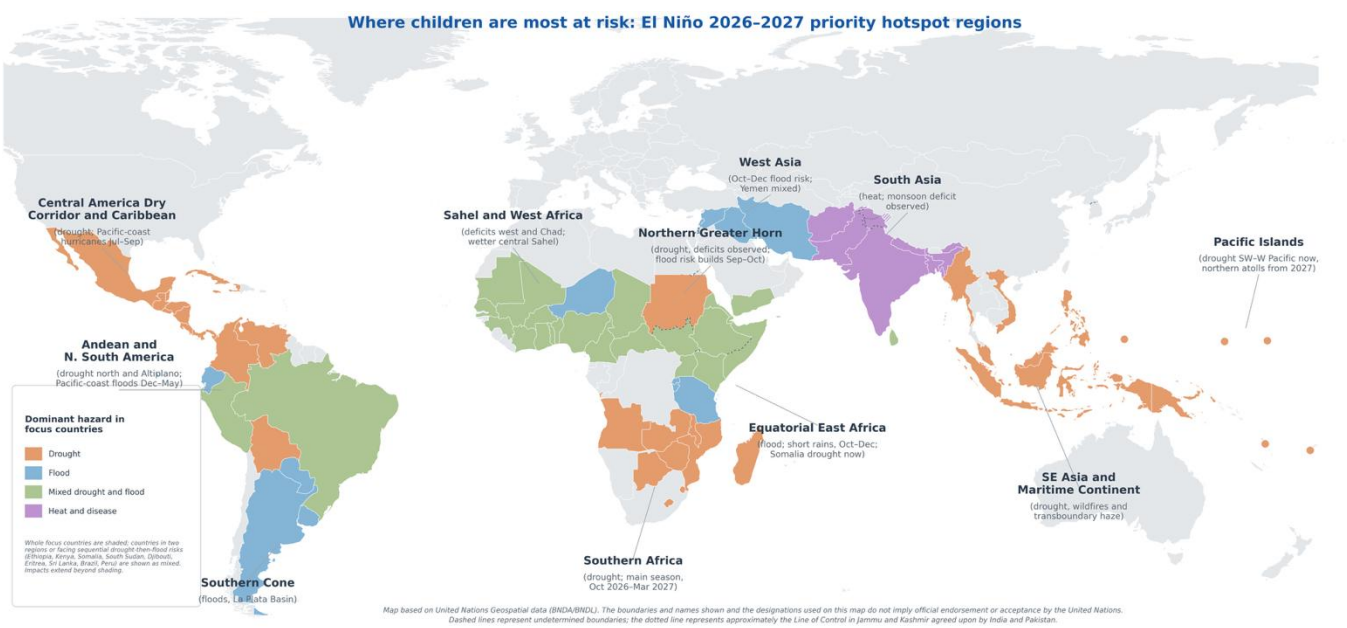


Figure 2. Indicative priority hotspots where children are most at risk. Shading shows the focus countries listed in the table below, by dominant hazard; impacts will not be confined to shaded areas. Priorities are to be validated with GPD teams and national meteorological services through the GPD consultation. Whole countries are shaded; countries appearing in two regions of the table (Ethiopia, Kenya, Brazil) are shown as mixed drought and flood. Updated 14 August 2026 to reflect the AGRHYMET (30 July), ICPAC and ACAPS/JRC analyses, including the new West Asia region. Map based on United Nations Geospatial data (BND/BNDR); dashed lines represent undetermined boundaries and the dotted line the approximate Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir.

El Niño-driven weather patterns vary significantly by region. The table below provides an initial, forecast-based assessment of where risks to children are likely to be greatest. It draws on analysis from the WMO, regional climate outlook forums, WHO, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network¹⁹ and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification²⁰. Priorities should be validated with country and regional offices and updated as forecasts evolve. Regional analysis should also identify where climate hazards intersect with gender inequality and social exclusion. This includes child marriage, gender-based violence, women’s economic vulnerability, disability, displacement and barriers to essential services.

Subnational targeting can be refined using UNICEF’s *Global Child Hazard Database 2026* and the Food and Agriculture Organization’s Agricultural Stress Index System. The latter uses 41 years of satellite data at up to

¹⁸ SciDev.Net, Focus on Disability: Kids at Risk from El Niño (January 2016): <https://www.scidev.net/global/column/disability-kids-risk-el-nino-food-security>

¹⁹ FEWS NET, El Niño 2026–2027 topic page and monitoring (2026): <https://fewsn.net/topics/el-nino-2026-2027>

²⁰ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), country and regional acute food insecurity analyses (2026): <https://www.ipcinfo.org>

one-square-kilometre resolution. As of June 2026, it indicates a greater than 50 per cent probability of drought in parts of Southern Africa, the Sahel, South and South-East Asia, the Central American Dry Corridor and the Caribbean²¹.

Region and focus countries	Expected El Niño impacts	Priority risks to children	Forecast confidence
Southern Africa Zimbabwe, southern Zambia, southern Malawi, south-central Mozambique, southern Madagascar, Lesotho, Eswatini, southern Angola and Botswana	Elevated risk of drought during the main rainy season, October 2026–March 2027, with possible harvest losses.	Food and nutrition insecurity, wasting, water scarcity, cholera, household economic stress and school dropout.	Moderate now; high for October–March
Equatorial East Africa Southern Somalia, south-eastern Ethiopia, eastern and coastal Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi	Enhanced short rains from October–December, increasing flood risk; the 2023 El Niño short rains displaced 1.3 million people in Somalia, 633,000 in Ethiopia and 546,000 in Kenya ²² .	Death and injury, infrastructure damage, cholera, vector-borne disease, displacement, overcrowding and livelihood losses.	High
Northern Greater Horn of Africa Sudan, South Sudan, central and northern Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, western Kenya and Uganda	Below-normal June–September rainfall, with deficits already observed May–July across Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Uganda and western Kenya ²³ . From October, above-normal rains over the equatorial parts (Uganda, western Kenya, southern Ethiopia) shift risks there from drought towards flooding, amplified by the developing positive IOD; northern areas remain drought-focused, though heavy rain over the Ethiopian Highlands and Lake Victoria Basin can still drive riverine flooding in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia	Malnutrition, water scarcity, disease, household economic stress and child marriage, compounded by conflict, displacement and Ebola risks.	High

²¹ FAO, El Niño agricultural drought risk mapping, Agricultural Stress Index System (ASIS) (June 2026): https://www.fao.org/giews/earthobservation/asis/index_1.jsp?lang=en

²² OCHA ROSEA, Eastern Africa El Niño Preparedness Alert (13 August 2026), prepared with the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group and the IGAD Regional Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Action: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/eastern-africa-el-nino-preparedness-alert-august-2026>.

²³ ICPAC, Climate Watch Advisory – the evolving dry conditions in the northern parts of Eastern Africa, August 2026 update (11 August 2026): <https://www.icpac.net/publications/climate-watch-advisory-the-evolving-dry-conditions-in-the-northern-parts-of-eastern-africa-august-2026-update/>

Region and focus countries	Expected El Niño impacts	Priority risks to children	Forecast confidence
	via the Nile, Sobat, Juba and Shabelle systems ^{24,25}		
Sahel and West Africa Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea and Burkina Faso; Gulf of Guinea coast (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria, Cameroon), Central African Republic	Dual-hazard outlook, worsened in AGRHYMET's 30 July update: below-normal rainfall risk has expanded across central and eastern Mauritania and Senegal, central and western Mali, northern and eastern Guinea, the Gulf of Guinea coast's second rainy season and most of Chad's agricultural zone – regionally, a sharp turn from recent years' exceptional floods towards drought risk, felt most acutely in Chad. Above-normal rainfall persists over the central Sahel (most of Niger, central and eastern Burkina Faso, eastern Mali), with above-normal flows and river-flood risk in the Komadougou-Yobé and Logone basins (April PRESASS hydrological outlook; mean flows forecast for the Chari and Lake Chad tributaries). Above-normal temperatures across the entire region will amplify water stress, pasture degradation and heat risks ²⁶ .	Malnutrition and water scarcity in drought-affected areas; flooding, cholera, diarrhoeal disease, damage to WASH services, displacement and harmful practices, including child marriage.	Moderate
South Asia India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan	Below-average monsoon rainfall already observed (India about 12 per cent below normal by early August) ²⁷ , with extreme heat; Sri Lanka and southern India expect heavy October–November rains with flood and landslide risk, and Afghanistan a wetter winter.	Heat stress, malnutrition, dengue, diarrhoeal disease, water scarcity, household economic stress and child marriage.	Moderate

²⁴ OCHA ROSEA, Eastern Africa El Niño Preparedness Alert (13 August 2026), prepared with the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group and the IGAD Regional Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Action: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/eastern-africa-el-nino-preparedness-alert-august-2026>.

²⁵ WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update (August to October 2026), prepared 20 July 2026: https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/global-seasonal-climate-update/gscu-as02026?access-token=XrD3ZrDjcY8wXIN3EPxcKbmcGlqhp_PDnCiZaWvX-wk

²⁶ AGRHYMET Regional Climate Centre (PRESASS), Outlook for the 2026 Rainy Season in West Africa and the Sahel (April 2026), and AGRHYMET CCR-AOS, Mise à jour des prévisions saisonnières 2026 (30 July 2026): https://agrhyment.cilss.int/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/COMMUNIQUE-FINAL_PRESASS_Ndjamenia_2026_EN.pdf

²⁷ India Meteorological Department, southwest monsoon seasonal rainfall statistics (as of early August 2026).

Region and focus countries	Expected El Niño impacts	Priority risks to children	Forecast confidence
West Asia Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen	Above-average rainfall likely October–November 2026 across Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria (strongest signal in northern areas), raising flood risk and aggravating conditions for populations already displaced by conflict. Above-average temperatures July–December 2026 increase wildfire risk, particularly July–September. In Yemen, a drier-than-normal Kharif season (July–September). In Yemen, a drier-than-normal Kharif season (July–September) threatens food production, followed by above-normal rainfall and flooding October–December, concentrated in the Southern Uplands.	Flood-related death, injury and displacement; damage to WASH and health services amid conflict; waterborne disease (including cholera in Yemen) and respiratory illness; wildfire exposure; malnutrition and water scarcity (Yemen); household economic stress compounded by fuel and fertilizer price rises.	Moderate
South-East Asia and Maritime Continent Indonesia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam, Myanmar, and Malaysia	Drought, wildfires and transboundary haze, already affecting Malaysia and Singapore in August. Drought may coincide with the main rice season, while higher fuel and fertilizer costs increase pressure on food prices.	Respiratory illness, water scarcity, dengue, food insecurity and household economic stress.	High
Central America Dry Corridor and Caribbean Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, Panama, Belize, Costa Rica and Jamaica	Hotter and drier conditions, while El Niño also enhances eastern Pacific hurricane activity (July–September) along coasts from Mexico to Nicaragua. Previous El Niño droughts reduced maize harvests by up to 60 per cent ²⁸ . Panama has introduced water-saving measures and phased draft reductions for the largest canal vessels – warning transits may be curtailed in 2027 – and Belize has triggered anticipatory drought action ²⁹ .	Malnutrition, water scarcity, livelihood losses, household economic stress, displacement and migration.	Moderate to high
Andean and northern South America Colombia, Venezuela, northern	Drought, extreme heat and wildfire risk across Colombia, Venezuela and northern Brazil, drought in the Bolivian Altiplano, and heavy rainfall and flooding	Dengue, flooding, cholera and diarrhoeal disease, damage to WASH services, household economic stress and displacement.	Moderate

²⁸ FAO, Major crop losses in Central America due to El Niño (14 September 2015): <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/Major-crop-losses-in-Central-America-due-to-El-Ni%C3%B1o/en>

²⁹ WFP, Belize triggers anticipatory action to support farmers ahead of drought risk (8 May 2026): <https://www.wfp.org/news/belize-triggers-anticipatory-action-support-farmers-ahead-drought-risk>

Region and focus countries	Expected El Niño impacts	Priority risks to children	Forecast confidence
Brazil, coastal Peru and Ecuador, and Bolivia	along the Pacific coast of Ecuador and northern Peru, peaking December 2026–May 2027.		
Southern Cone Southern Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and northern Argentina	Above-normal rainfall and increased flood risk in the La Plata Basin; southern Brazil's July rainfall reached 256 per cent of average, with the Paraná River forecast to rise.	Flood-related death and injury, damage to WASH and other essential services, displacement, waterborne disease and household economic stress.	Moderate
Pacific Islands Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu	Drought is developing in the south-west Pacific (Fiji, Vanuatu) and western Pacific (Palau), with severe drought expected to reach the northern atolls from early 2027 after an initially wet phase; cyclone activity is shifting eastward towards island groups rarely affected. Limited freshwater storage and dependence on imported food and fuel increase vulnerability. Central Pacific atolls (Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru) expect above-normal rainfall through late 2026 instead ³⁰ .	Water shortages, crop losses, higher food prices, disease, household economic stress, displacement and planned relocation.	Moderate to high

Table sources: Southern Africa – FEWS NET El Niño 2026–2027 outlook³¹ and WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update³²; Angola, Botswana and Madagascar included per the 2023–24 El Niño drought³³ and FAO ASIS drought-probability mapping³⁴. Equatorial East Africa – ICPAC dual-risk statement (24 June 2026) and OCHA ROSEA Eastern Africa El Niño Preparedness Alert (13 August 2026); GHACOF 74 (17–18 August 2026) will issue the definitive October–December outlook. Northern Greater Horn – WMO/GHACOF June–September 2026 statement³⁵ and ICPAC Climate

³⁰ SPREP / Pacific Islands Climate Outlook Forum (PICOF-18), regional statement and El Niño 2026 guidance for the Pacific (April–June 2026): <https://www.pacificrcc.net/news/el-nino-likely-mid-2026-pacific-islands-climate-outlook-forum-18-warns>

³¹ FEWS NET, El Niño 2026–2027 topic page and monitoring (2026): <https://fewsn.net/topics/el-nino-2026-2027>

³² WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update (August to October 2026), prepared 20 July 2026: https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/global-seasonal-climate-update/gscu-aso2026?access-token=XrD3ZrDjcY8wXIN3EPxcKbmcGJqHP_PDnCjZaWvX-wk

³³ World Weather Attribution, El Niño key driver of drought in highly vulnerable Southern African countries (2024): <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/el-nino-key-driver-of-drought-in-highly-vulnerable-southern-african-countries/>; OCHA, Southern Africa: El Niño Regional Humanitarian Overview (September 2024): <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/mozambique/southern-africa-el-nino-regional-humanitarian-overview-september-2024>

³⁴ FAO, El Niño agricultural drought risk mapping, Agricultural Stress Index System (ASIS) (June 2026): https://www.fao.org/giews/earthobservation/asis/index_1.jsp?lang=en

³⁵ WMO and ICPAC/GHACOF, Below-normal rainfall expected for the northern Greater Horn of Africa, June–September 2026 outlook (2026): <https://wmo.int/media/news/below-normal-rainfall-expected-norther-greater-horn-of-africa>

Watch Advisory (11 August 2026)³⁶ and OCHA ROSEA Preparedness Alert (13 August 2026)³⁷. Sahel and West Africa – AGRHYMET/PRESASS 2026 outlook³⁸ and AGRHYMET seasonal forecast update of 30 July 2026 (Cameroon and Central African Republic per JRC anticipatory analysis)³⁹. South Asia – WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update and IMD monsoon monitoring (August 2026). West Asia – ACAPS Global El Niño Overview (July 2026) and WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update. South-East Asia and Maritime Continent – WMO, ASMC seasonal outlook (4 August 2026) and FEWS NET. Central America Dry Corridor and Caribbean – FEWS NET, ACAPS, WFP and Panama Canal Authority advisories. Andean South America and Southern Cone – WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update, ACAPS and INMET data reported by Reuters (August 2026). Pacific Islands – SPREP/PICOF-18 regional statement and SPREP June 2026 guidance, and NIWA Island Climate Update No. 310 (August 2026)^{40,41}.

The priorities listed above are indicative and will shift with the seasons; GHACOF 74 (17–18 August) and SARCOF-33 (late August) will further update the East and Southern Africa outlooks. OCHA and the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group rank Somalia and South Sudan as very-high concern, and Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda as high concern, within Eastern Africa⁴². For example, in East Africa, flood risk is expected to peak during the October–December 2026 short rains, while drought risk in Southern Africa will build through the October 2026–March 2027 rainy season. Nutrition caseloads may peak several months after a failed harvest and continue into 2027.

The prioritization combines forecast likelihood, expected severity and children’s vulnerability; it is not a quantitative index. It will be continuously updated by regional and national meteorological services, among others. Seasonal rainfall alerts based on the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts’ SEAS5 forecasts, filtered for forecast skill, will provide an additional check by distinguishing higher-confidence hotspots from areas where signals remain uncertain.

³⁶ ICPAC, Climate Watch Advisory – the evolving dry conditions in the northern parts of Eastern Africa, August 2026 update (11 August 2026): <https://www.icpac.net/publications/climate-watch-advisory-the-evolving-dry-conditions-in-the-northern-parts-of-eastern-africa-august-2026-update/>

³⁷ OCHA ROSEA, Eastern Africa El Niño Preparedness Alert (13 August 2026), prepared with the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group and the IGAD Regional Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Action: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/eastern-africa-el-nino-preparedness-alert-august-2026>.

³⁸ AGRHYMET Regional Climate Centre (PRESASS), Outlook for the 2026 Rainy Season in West Africa and the Sahel (April 2026): https://agrhyment.cilss.int/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/COMMUNIQUE-FINAL_PRESASS_Ndjamena_2026_EN.pdf

³⁹ AGRHYMET CCR-AOS, Mise à jour des prévisions saisonnières 2026 (30 July 2026): https://agrhyment.cilss.int/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/COMMUNIQUE-FINAL_PRESASS_Ndjamena_2026_EN.pdf

⁴⁰ SPREP / Pacific Islands Climate Outlook Forum (PICOF-18), regional statement and El Niño 2026 guidance for the Pacific (April–June 2026): <https://www.pacificccc.net/news/el-nino-likely-mid-2026-pacific-islands-climate-outlook-forum-18-warns>

⁴¹ August 2026 source additions: ICPAC, Climate Watch Advisory – August 2026 update (11 August 2026): <https://www.icpac.net/publications/climate-watch-advisory-the-evolving-dry-conditions-in-the-northern-parts-of-eastern-africa-august-2026-update/>; OCHA ROSEA, Eastern Africa El Niño Preparedness Alert (13 August 2026), prepared with the FSNWG and the IGAD Regional Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Action; ACAPS, Global El Niño Overview: Countries to Watch (7 July 2026): https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20260707_ACAPS_El_Nino_Overview_-_Countries_to_watch.pdf; JRC, From Forecast to Risk: An Anticipatory Analysis of the 2026–27 El Niño: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC147365>; ASMC, Seasonal Outlook (4 August 2026): <https://asmc.asean.org/asmc-seasonal-outlook/>; NIWA/Earth Sciences New Zealand, Island Climate Update No. 310 (August 2026): <https://niwa.co.nz/climate-and-weather/island-climate-update>; India Meteorological Department, southwest monsoon monitoring (August 2026); Panama Canal Authority draft and water-conservation advisories (July–August 2026); INMET data reported by Reuters (13 August 2026); NOAA Climate Prediction Center, ENSO Diagnostic Discussion (13 August 2026): https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/ens0_advisory/ensodisc.shtml

⁴² OCHA ROSEA, Eastern Africa El Niño Preparedness Alert (13 August 2026), prepared with the Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group and the IGAD Regional Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Action: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/eastern-africa-el-nino-preparedness-alert-august-2026>.

4. UNICEF's programmatic offer: key actions across programmes

The table below shows how El Niño-related impacts can harm children and how UNICEF programmes can help governments act to reduce these risks. It distinguishes between measures needed now to prepare for the 2026–2027 ENSO, and longer-term investments in disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation (CCA), and risk governance to reduce losses from future ENSO cycles.

	How children are affected	Short-term actions	Long-term actions
Health	Heatwaves increase child admissions and worsen existing health conditions. Floods and droughts increase the risk of cholera and other diarrhoeal diseases, while warmer and wetter conditions can expand malaria, dengue and Rift Valley fever⁴³. Displacement increases disease transmission while reducing access to preventive measures, including insecticide-treated nets. Fuel and supply disruptions can interrupt cold chains, medicines and essential health services, with particularly severe consequences for pregnant women, adolescent girls and young children.	• Strengthen disease surveillance and outbreak early-warning systems. • Protect primary health care services, including immunization, from extreme weather events. • Use community listening and gender equality, disability and social inclusion analysis to identify and reach vulnerable groups. • Strengthen risk communication and community engagement. • Pre-position essential medicines, including oral rehydration salts and zinc. • Prepare health facilities for extreme heat, floods, displacement and other climate-related shocks.	• Build climate-resilient, disability-inclusive and gender-responsive health systems. • Integrate climate information into disease surveillance. • Strengthen epidemiological and behavioral assessments of climate-sensitive diseases – cholera, malaria, dengue and other outbreak risks – to target surveillance, immunization and pre-positioning. • Train frontline health workers to respond to ENSO-related risks. • Strengthen prevention and preparedness for ENSO-related climate extremes at community and household levels. • Provide reliable solar power and cooling for health facilities and cold chains. • Make primary health care facilities resilient to floods and extreme heat. • Integrate El Niño–Southern Oscillation risks into national health adaptation plans.
Nutrition	Crop losses disrupted livelihoods and rising food prices increase wasting and other forms of malnutrition. Following a poor 2026 season, the largest nutrition caseloads may not peak until early to mid-2027. Following poor 2026 seasons in the Sahel and the Greater Horn, the largest caseloads there may not peak until early to mid-2027; in southern Africa, caseloads would build later, after the April 2027 harvest. During the 2023–2024 El Niño, almost 300,000 children were threatened by severe acute malnutrition across six southern African countries. In food-insecure households, women and girls often eat less or last, placing adolescent girls at particular risk.	• Forecast nutrition caseloads using differentiated risk and vulnerability analysis. • Secure and pre-position ready-to-use therapeutic food. • Include nutrition triggers in anticipatory action frameworks. • Expand early detection through primary health care and community systems. • Strengthen household nutrition counselling. • Sustain infant and young child feeding support, including for children with disabilities. • Work with partners to protect household food security, seeds and agricultural inputs.	• Build climate-resilient and nutrition-sensitive food systems. • Address the specific nutrition needs of women and girls. • Promote drought-tolerant crops. • Integrate nutrition into national adaptation and disaster risk reduction plans. • Establish permanent early-warning systems that trigger action ahead of ENSO-related climate shocks.

⁴³ WHO, El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) fact sheet (2023): [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/el-nino-southern-oscillation-\(enso\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/el-nino-southern-oscillation-(enso))

	How children are affected	Short-term actions	Long-term actions
		Distribute drought-tolerant seeds and support early harvesting.	
WASH	Drought reduces water for drinking and hygiene and forces families to use unsafe sources. Floods damage sanitation systems and contaminate water supplies. Both increase the risk of waterborne disease and child mortality. Water scarcity also increases unpaid care and protection risks for women and girls, particularly adolescent girls who may travel farther to collect water.	- Strengthen groundwater and surface-water monitoring and early-warning systems. - Develop and implement drought contingency plans. - Conduct climate-risk and gender equality, disability and social inclusion assessments. - Identify the most vulnerable areas, population groups and services. - Map and protect water sources. - Monitor water quality. - Pre-position water-treatment supplies in flood-prone areas. - Engage communities in water monitoring and conservation.	- Rehabilitate and construct climate-resilient, disability-inclusive and gender-responsive water, sanitation and hygiene services. - Conduct water-resource and water-efficiency assessments. - Develop climate-resilient water-safety plans. - Strengthen technical capacity for climate-risk assessment. - Secure national budget allocations and climate finance for resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services. - Integrate water, sanitation and hygiene climate risks into national policies and strategies.
Education	Drought, floods, extreme heat and displacement increase absenteeism and dropout, particularly among girls, children with disabilities and displaced children. The 2015–2016 El Niño was associated with tens of thousands of children leaving school. School feeding, water and sanitation, safe travel routes and teacher availability can be disrupted, while schools may be temporarily used as shelters.	- Help education ministries plan for continuity of learning. - Protect and adapt school feeding and water, sanitation and hygiene services. - Provide teachers with clear emergency protocols and adapted teaching approaches. - Keep schools open for learning, relief and risk communication where it is safe to do so. - Review school risk-management plans. - Identify schools most exposed to drought, floods and extreme heat. - Prepare temporary, remote and accelerated learning options. - Plan safe return-to-school campaigns following disruptions.	- Apply the Comprehensive School Safety Framework across its three pillars: Safer school facilities, school safety and educational continuity management, risk reduction and resilience education. - Integrate climate and disaster risk into education sector plans. - Strengthen Education Management Information Systems and risk-data systems. - Integrate climate resilience into curricula and teacher professional development. - Strengthen climate-resilient school infrastructure standards and education budgets. - Make disability inclusion and gender responsiveness cross-cutting priorities.
Child Protection	Displacement, livelihood losses and household stress increase child labour, family separation, violence, exploitation and other harmful coping practices, particularly where climate shocks overlap with conflict. Girls face disproportionate risks of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, sexual exploitation and gender-based violence.	- Strengthen national and local child protection systems, including mobile and digital case management and a trained social service workforce. - Map safe spaces and evacuation sites and prepare pre-emptive evacuation plans. - Monitor climate-related displacement and mobility, including risks of adolescent pregnancy, child marriage and other harmful practices.	- Integrate child protection into national disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation and risk-governance frameworks. - Strengthen and maintain a trained social service workforce. - Establish pre-agreed case-management protocols for climate-related displacement. - Strengthen gender-based violence risk mitigation and referral pathways. - Sustain community-based child protection mechanisms between shocks.

	How children are affected	Short-term actions	Long-term actions
		• Establish community-based mental health and psychosocial support and integrate disaster risk reduction and climate resilience into positive-parenting programmes. • Strengthen risk communication, community engagement and accessible feedback mechanisms, with meaningful participation by adolescent girls and young people.	
Social Protection	Income and livelihood losses, rising prices, asset depletion, heavier unpaid care responsibilities and disrupted services reduce families' ability to meet children's basic needs. This increases child poverty, harmful coping practices and long-term losses in health, education and human development. Households experiencing poverty and social exclusion face the greatest risks, while women-headed households and female caregivers may have less access to resources and coping options.	• Strengthen shock-responsive social protection through climate-informed registries, pre-agreed triggers and pre-arranged financing, including Central Emergency Response Fund anticipatory action windows. • Activate anticipatory or time-bound cash assistance, maintain existing benefits and strengthen links to essential services, prioritizing children, women and caregivers. • Ensure accountability to affected communities through accessible grievance and feedback mechanisms.	• Establish climate-resilient social protection as a permanent national system, supported by climate- and gender-responsive policies, financing and delivery mechanisms. • Strengthen risk-informed child, family and disability benefits and link them to climate-resilient services. • Maintain grievance and feedback mechanisms to strengthen accountability and ensure systems respond to community needs.

Abbreviations

AA, anticipatory action;

AAP, accountability to affected populations;

CCA, climate change adaptation;

DRR, disaster risk reduction;

EMOPS, Office of Emergency Programmes;

ENSO, El Niño–Southern Oscillation;

FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations;

GHACOF, Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum;

GPD, Global Programme Division;

IASC, Inter-Agency Standing Committee;

IOD, Indian Ocean Dipole;

IPC, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification;

IRI, International Research Institute for Climate and Society;

NOAA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Climate Prediction Center, CPC);

PEAR, Preparedness for Anticipatory and Early Action and Readiness (inter-agency preparedness note);

RAPS, Risk Analysis and Preparedness Section;

WASH, water, sanitation and hygiene;

WHO, World Health Organization;

WMO, World Meteorological Organization.