

© UNICEF Cambodia/2022/Bunsak But

EL NIÑO 2026–2027

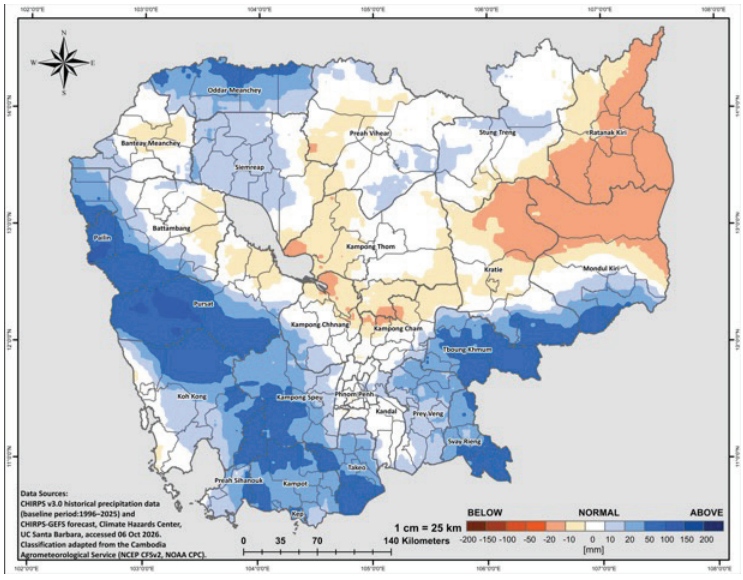
SITUATION HIGHLIGHTS: historical data and forecast

The World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) September 2026 update indicated a near-100% likelihood that El Niño would persist through February 2027. Its October update highlighted that the event was intensifying and expected to peak around December. [1, 2]

Cambodia's potential El Niño risk window is expected to come late 2026 to mid-2027 (FAO, WFP). The regional outlook indicates an increased likelihood of below-normal rainfall in parts of eastern Mainland Southeast Asia, and above-normal temperatures across much of Southeast Asia including Cambodia. Local impacts will vary. [4]

Cambodia's Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM) reported that the country's rainy season was expected to end around the third week of October 2026, with rainfall gradually decreasing as the country transitioned towards the dry season. The Ministry urged efficient water use and conservation. [3]

UNICEF Cambodia's forecast for 16–29 October indicates below-normal rainfall—up to 20 mm below the 1996–2025 historical average—in parts of Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Kratie, Mondulkiri, and Ratanakiri provinces. Other areas are forecast to receive above-normal rainfall—at least 20 mm above the historical average. Above-normal maximum temperatures are not identified as a concern in this two-week forecast, and no meteorological drought is expected.



Rainfall anomaly forecast (16-29 Oct 2026)

EL NIÑO FORECAST IN CAMBODIA

- **Potential risk window:** Late 2026 to mid-2027
- **Potential conditions:** Below-normal rainfall and above-normal temperatures during the dry season (Forecast period: 16 – 29 Oct 2026)

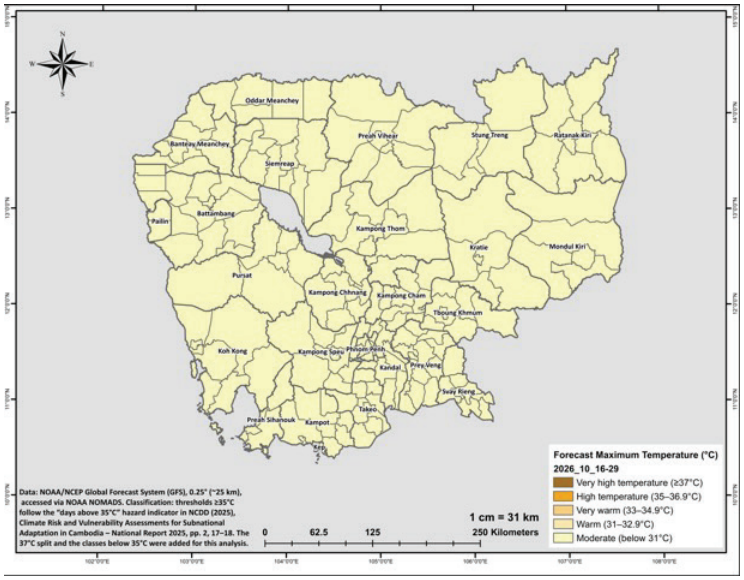
PRIORITY REGIONS

- **Historical drought hotspots:** Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Kandal, Koh Kong, Kratie, Pailin, Phnom Penh, Preah Sihanouk, Preah Vihear, Pursat, Siem Reap, Stung Treng, Takeo and Tboung Khmum.
- **Below-normal rainfall forecast (16–29 October 2026):** Parts of Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Kratie, Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri.
- **Above-normal temperature forecast (16–29 October 2026):** No areas identified at this time.

EL NIÑO: COMPOUNDING RISKS TO CHILDREN

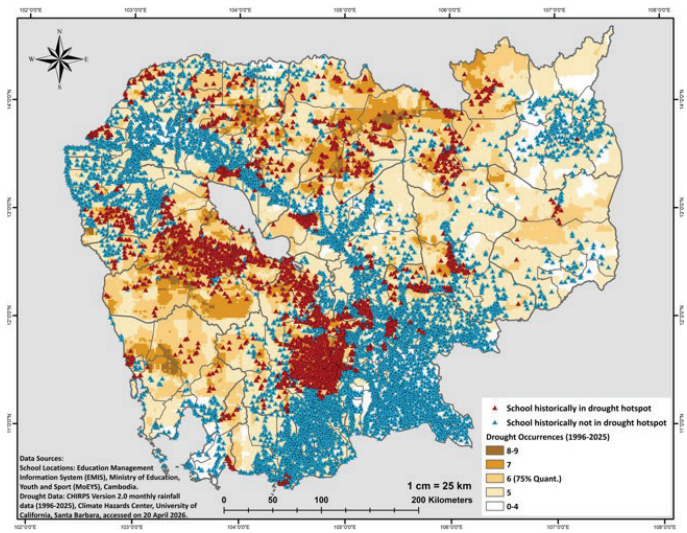
- **1.3 million children (of which around 640,000 girls)** live in historically drought-prone areas and may face increased risks of water shortages and heat.
- **3,872 schools,** serving approximately **1.07 million students,** are in historically drought-prone areas and may face increased risks to water availability and safe learning environments.
- **401 health care facilities** in historically drought-prone areas may face increased risks to water availability and service continuity.
- **132 private water operators,** serving approximately **554,700 households**, may face challenges in maintaining reliable water supplies if dry conditions intensify.

Next update November 2026

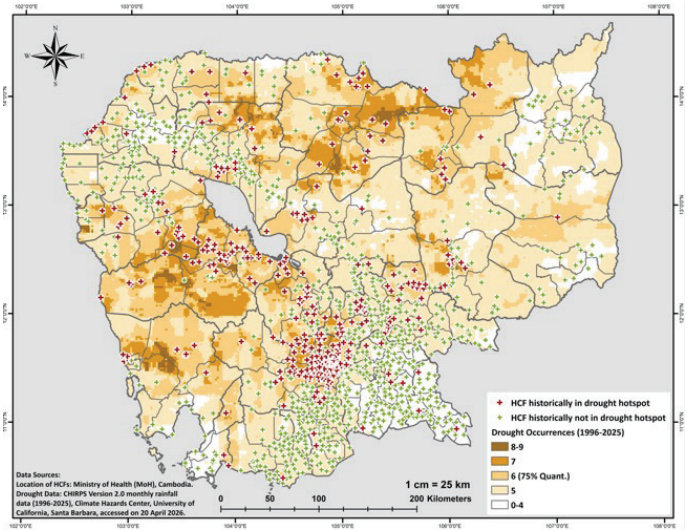


Maximum Temperature Forecast (16-29 Oct 2026)

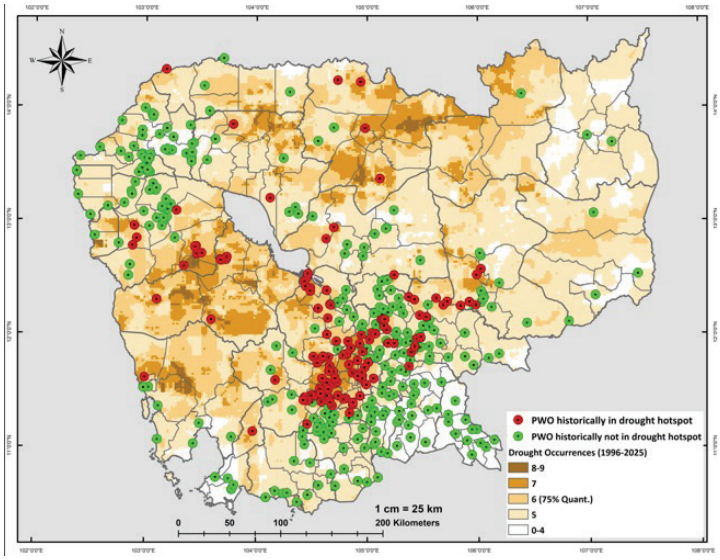
With El Niño impacts expected in Cambodia from late 2026 through mid-2027, historical meteorological drought hotspots offer a starting point for prioritizing preparedness. They cover 17 provinces, 77 districts and 360 communes, including approximately 1.3 million children (including around 640,000 girls), 3,872 schools serving 1.07 million students, 401 health-care facilities, and 132 private water operators serving around 554,700 households. These figures indicate historical exposure to drought; they do not confirm that these communities or services are currently affected by El Niño. Preparedness priorities should be updated as forecasts and conditions evolve.



Schools historically in drought hotspots



Health care facilities in drought hotspot



Private water operators historically in drought hotspots



Estimated Impacts on Children: the need for Preparedness

El Niño could compound existing vulnerabilities among children related to gender, disability and ethnicity and affect the essential services they depend on, particularly if below-normal rainfall and above-normal temperatures persist. An estimated 1.3 million children (including around 640,000 girls) live in areas historically prone to drought and may face increased risks of water shortages and heat exposure. Potential impacts include reduced water availability for households, schools and health facilities, pressure on water supplies, drought- and heat-related health risks, and disruption to hygiene, learning and other essential services.

These are the risks being considered in preparing for potential El Niño-related humanitarian impacts. The proposed preparedness approach uses forecasts, historical drought exposure and local assessments to inform inclusive targeting, with priorities adjusted as conditions and forecasts evolve.

CHILD PROTECTION: Water scarcity, extreme heat and livelihood pressures may increase household stress and drive internal displacement and cross-border migration, heightening children's risks of violence, harmful practices, neglect and exploitation, including child labour, child marriage, as well as psychosocial distress. Children in residential and correctional institutions face additional risks from inadequate access to safe drinking water, cooling, sanitation and nutritious food, particularly in overcrowded or poorly ventilated facilities.

HEALTH: High temperatures and constrained water supplies can increase risks of dehydration, heat-related illness and hygiene-related diseases, while putting pressure on health facilities' water supply and service continuity. Historical drought hotspot analysis prioritizes 401 health care facilities. Pregnant women, mothers, infants, young children, adolescent girls and women are at particular risk, with health services expected to be strained.

Nutrition: Drier conditions may affect household water access and safe handling of food, food production and livelihoods, which could increase nutrition risks if they persist and interact with other vulnerabilities.

EDUCATION: If water availability declines or heat increases, schools may face challenges maintaining safe drinking water, handwashing and sanitation including menstrual hygiene, as well as comfortable and continuous learning. Historical drought hotspot data identify 3,872 schools serving approximately 1.07 million students (including around 520,000 girls) as a baseline for targeted screening and preparedness.

WASH: Water availability is a central preparedness concern. In addition to the institutions identified above for WASH support, the historical drought hotspot analysis identifies 132 private water operators serving approximately 554,700 households in areas with a history of drought. Their services may come under pressure if dry conditions persist, so these operators are an important group to consider when prioritizing preparedness measures to protect water sources and maintain reliable water supply.

SOCIAL PROTECTION: Drier conditions may reduce household income and increase the cost or difficulty of accessing water, food and other essentials, particularly for families already facing poverty or other vulnerabilities. Preparedness should use forecasts, social protection data and local assessments to identify households that may need support, and ensure that assistance, referral pathways and delivery systems can be adapted if needs increase.



UNICEF Preparedness approach

UNICEF is prioritizing the following preparedness and anticipatory actions:

CHILD PROTECTION: UNICEF's child protection preparedness will focus on mitigating risks before a crisis escalates, while ensuring the continuity of essential protection services in hotspots. UNICEF will strengthen the capacity of 200 social workers, local authorities, and community-based workers to identify and respond to emerging child protection risks linked to El Niño. It will also maintain functional referral pathways for case management, psychosocial support, and the prevention of violence and exploitation, benefiting an estimated 600 girls and boys and 6,000 parents and caregivers. Risk monitoring in hotspot areas will inform timely, context-specific action and enable UNICEF and its partners to adapt the response as conditions evolve.

HEALTH: UNICEF will support health authorities to assess climate-related risks and strengthen preparedness in up to 100 health facilities, including by introducing inclusive heat-health procedures and engaging communities. UNICEF will train 250 rapid response team officers in surveillance and response to climate-sensitive diseases, and 250 health staff in the clinical management of these diseases. These efforts will support services for an estimated 635,000 pregnant women and 174,000 children, including about 85,000 girls. Community outreach through mother groups will provide basic psychological first aid and peer support for caregivers.

NUTRITION: UNICEF will work with government and NGO partners to strengthen nutrition preparedness, early warning, rapid assessment, and the safe management of emergency donations in five provinces. It will also train 900 frontline health workers in nutrition-in-emergencies response. Community teams will screen children for wasting, make referrals, conduct follow-up, and provide maternal, infant, and young child nutrition counselling in high-risk villages. These activities will reach an estimated 71,500 children, nearly 35,000 of them girls, and their caregivers. If needs arise, UNICEF will provide additional outreach supplies and service-continuity support to children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

EDUCATION: UNICEF will support the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) in developing guidance on school operations during droughts and extreme heat, incorporating input from provincial, district, and school-level officials. UNICEF will train 100 officials to implement the guidance. The plan will also include broader capacity-building for 500 staff, training for 180 participants in climate-impact data collection, training for 600 teachers in remedial teaching, and home-learning packages for up to 90,000 Grade 1–3 students, including 43,900 girls, if the government decides to close schools.

WASH: UNICEF will help maintain water-service continuity during El Niño by providing at least 40 high-risk piped water operators with contingency water-treatment supplies, incentives, training, and climate-risk planning. This support is expected to benefit around 200,000 people. Over the medium term, UNICEF will provide 13 operators with technical assistance to protect water sources and improve storage, treatment, and network efficiency. It will also help them access solar energy subsidies to sustain services during drought. UNICEF will provide water filters and essential water-storage and hygiene supplies to 426 schools and 118 health facilities in potential hotspot areas, supporting 10,000 students, including nearly 4,900 girls, and 50,000 community members. Residential care institutions will receive water filters, soap, and detergent to help maintain safe water and hygiene for residents.

SOCIAL PROTECTION: UNICEF will work with the National Social Assistance Fund, the General Secretariat of the National Social Protection Council, and WFP to strengthen shock-responsive social protection for up to 100,000 vulnerable households affected by climate-related shocks. Support will include rapid assessments and assistance with designing and implementing responses, alongside the rollout of Shock-Responsive Social Assistance Operational Manuals at the subnational level.

SBC, AAP & EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION: UNICEF will strengthen preparedness, resilience, and early action for El Niño through evidence-based risk communication and community engagement. Working through community networks and media channels, UNICEF will promote life-saving practices, gather community feedback, and support equitable access to essential services. These efforts will directly engage 200,000 children, nearly 98,000 of them girls, and family members in affected communities. Public advocacy and mass and digital communications will extend the reach of these efforts to more than 2 million people.

Resources and Partnerships

UNICEF's preparedness approach considers national priorities, existing systems and the changing risk picture. Working with the Royal Government of Cambodia and partners, UNICEF will use forecasts, historical drought exposure and local assessments to identify where children and families may need additional support. It will coordinate with government, development and humanitarian partners, while exploring complementary contributions from the private sector and international financial institutions. This coordination will help align available supplies, technical expertise and financing with national preparedness plans, and identify gaps that may require further support.

Sector	Total Requirement for Short & Medium Term
Health	**407 500**
Nutrition	**366 000**
Child Protection	**202 600**
Education	**663 000**
WASH	**550 836**
Social Protection	**135 000**
SBC-AAP- Ext Comm	**150 000**
TOTAL	**2 474 936**

Reference

[1] World Meteorological Organization (WMO), El Niño/La Niña Update (August 2026), published 3 September 2026: **https://public.wmo.int/resources/publication-series/el-ninola-nina-updates/august-2026**

[2] WMO, "Sea-surface temperatures reflect strengthening El Niño," 8 October 2026: **https://wmo.int/media/news/sea-surface-temperatures-reflect-strengthening-el-nino**

[3] Agence Kampuchea Presse (AKP), "Cambodia's 2026 Rainy Season Expected to End in Third Week of October," 10 October 2026, reporting on a MOWRAM notice: **https://akp.gov.kh/index.php/post/detail/383608**

[4] ASEAN Specialized Meteorological Centre (ASMC), Seasonal Outlook for October–December 2026, updated 5 October 2026: **https://asmc.asean.org/asmc-seasonal-outlook**

[5] NOAA Climate Prediction Center, ENSO Diagnostic Discussion, 8 October 2026: **https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/enso_disc_oct2026/ensodisc.shtml**

UNICEF Cambodia internal analysis: country-level rainfall anomaly forecast for 16–29 October 2026 (approximately 5 km × 5 km resolution), historical drought hotspot analysis and related child/service exposure estimates. Forecasts and exposure estimates are not observed impacts.

Who to contact for further information:

Maha Damaj
Representative
Cambodia Country Office
Email: mdamaj@unicef.org

Michele Paba
Chief WASH, Climate and Environment
Cambodia Country Office
mpaba@unicef.org

unicef
for every child