

Before its peak, El Nino brings failed crops and empty fishing nets

El Nino is already disrupting livelihoods and weather patterns around the world as one of the strongest events in decades continues to intensify. With its peak still months away, scientists warn the powerful Pacific climate phenomenon will bring more drought and flooding into 2027, while human-caused global warming is making some of its effects more severe.

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In Peru, unusually warm waters have driven anchovies away from the coast, leaving fishing boats idle and threatening thousands of jobs.

Across parts of Central America, drought has destroyed maize and bean crops on which rural families depend – examples of the growing disruption as El Nino gathers strength.

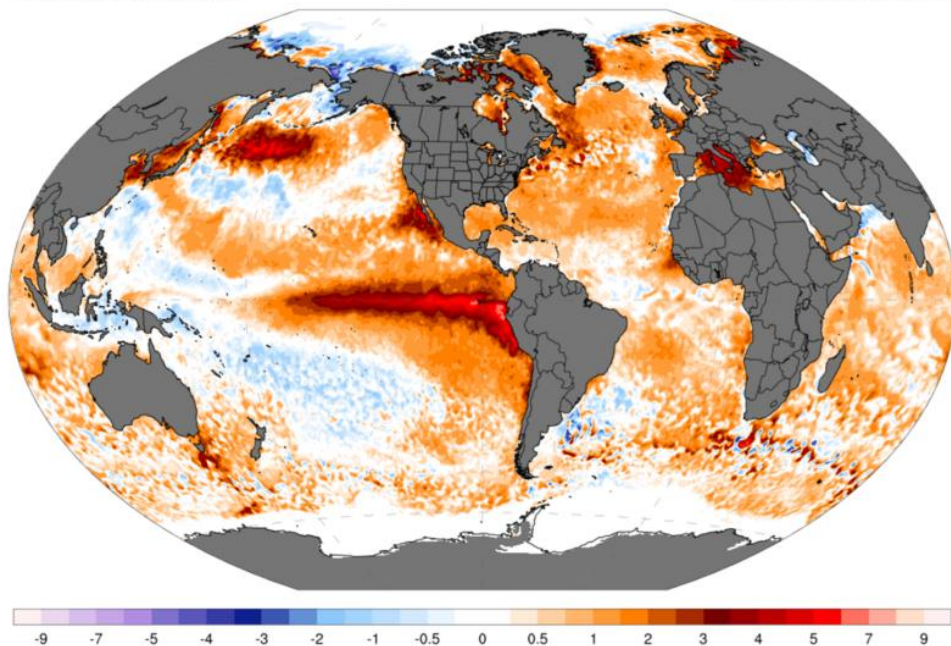
[El Nino](#) occurs when a large part of the tropical [Pacific](#) becomes unusually warm, changing winds, rainfall and temperatures far beyond the ocean itself. It appears every two to seven years and alternates with the cooler La Nina phase.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the [United Nations](#) weather agency, said this month that El Nino was firmly established and would intensify into a very strong event in the coming months.

Its peak is expected towards the end of the year, while the WMO puts the likelihood of it continuing through February 2027 at close to 100 percent.

NOAA OISST V2.1 SST Anomaly (°C) [1991-2020 baseline]
Wed, Sep 02, 2026 | preliminary

ClimateReanalyzer.org
Climate Change Institute | University of Maine



Ocean temperature anomalies on 2 September, with unusually warm waters shown across the equatorial Pacific. The Mediterranean is also warmer than normal, due to climate change rather than El Nino. @ ClimateReanalyzer.org, CC BY 4.0

Boats at a standstill

At the port of Callao, on the outskirts of [Peru](#)'s capital Lima, dozens of fishing boats are sitting idle. Pelicans wait for catches that are no longer arriving as warmer waters drive anchovies away from the coast.

“This is where we've ended up: the boats are docked because of El Nino,” Pedro Martin, 62, who represents a local fishing union, told RFI.

Anchovies thrive in cold, nutrient-rich water but move into deeper waters beyond the reach of fishing nets as temperatures rise. They are Peru's main fishing resource and are used to produce fishmeal for animal feed and fertiliser.

Peru caught just 32,800 tonnes of anchovies in May 2026, compared with 1.3 million tonnes in May 2025. The government ended the anchovy fishing season on 19 August, although industrial boats had already largely stopped going out because stocks were so scarce.

Around 8,000 industrial fishers are registered in Peru and the industry supports thousands more jobs on land.

The fishing industry is now looking anxiously towards the next season, which would normally begin in November. Jessica Luna, president of Peru's National Fishing Society, said it was still unclear whether conditions would allow it to go ahead.

“The situation is very worrying. We still don't know whether we will be able to have a second fishing season,” she said.

Exceptional strength

This El Nino has already reached unusually high intensity for this stage of the season, with several forecasts suggesting it could become exceptionally strong.

“If, as everything currently indicates, this El Nino ranks among the four strongest events observed since 1980, we can expect temperature anomalies in the tropical Pacific to continue until the middle of next year,” Jérôme Vialard, a research director at the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development ([IRD](#)), told RFI.

Some of the most extreme warming is hidden below the ocean surface. Temperatures there have been measured at more than 8C above normal in some areas, while surface anomalies are smaller.

“At the surface, the anomalies are more moderate, at around 2 to 3C. But they cover very large areas, so they alter atmospheric circulation on a global scale,” Vialard added.

Those shifts can produce very different conditions around the world. Drought is expected in [Indonesia](#) and [Australia](#), while Peru and [Ecuador](#) face the risk of very heavy rainfall. Parts of [Brazil](#) and southern [Africa](#) may also experience drought.

“Many regions of the world are affected, but not the entire world. El Nino has an impact on [Europe](#), for example, but that impact is very weak and limited,” Vialard said.

Harvests wiped out

Further north, drought is already taking a heavy toll on [Central America's dry corridor](#), which stretches across [Guatemala](#), [El Salvador](#), Honduras and [Nicaragua](#). Around 10 million people live in the region, many of them dependent on subsistence farming.

[An assessment](#) by Oxfam and humanitarian organisation Action Against Hunger found widespread crop failures across Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, with tens of thousands of farming families affected.

Of 73,000 farms that planted maize for the first growing cycle of 2026, around 70,000 reported devastating harvests. Bean crops have also been badly hit and more than 23,000 households reported reduced access to water.

“We are seeing widespread crop losses caused by the drought triggered by El Nino,” said Oxfam's humanitarian manager for Central America, Ivan Aguilar.

[Maize](#) and beans are staple foods across the region, leaving families particularly exposed when both crops fail. In the communities assessed, **78.6 percent of households had lost practically their entire harvest.**

In southern Guatemala, maize and bean farmer Jose Hernandez has been left without work as he waits for rain.

“In June it only rained during two storms. In July, August and September, not a single drop fell,” Hernandez said.

“Some maize fields flowered, while others that were planted later only sprouted. Then everything completely dried up. This year the harvest was entirely lost in my community.”

Food prices are also rising. Between July-August 2025 and the same period in 2026, prices for basic foods increased by between 11 and 54 percent in Guatemala and 12 to 40 percent in Honduras.

In El Salvador, the price of sugar rose by as much as 85 percent, the assessment found.

[Farm workers face a ‘double-edged sword’ of extreme heat and pesticides](#)

Time to prepare

One advantage is that El Nino and its likely strength can be forecast months in advance, giving countries time to prepare.

“Seasonal forecasts, six to nine months ahead, allow us to anticipate and manage climate risks in tropical regions and around the Pacific,” explained Eric Guilyardi, an oceanographer and climatologist at France's National Centre for Scientific Research ([CNRS](#)).

Farmers in Australia, for example, can choose crops better able to withstand water shortages when drought is expected.

But the current El Nino is unfolding against a much longer warming trend. Global temperatures are now around 1.4C above pre-industrial levels, largely because of greenhouse gas emissions from human activity.

A very strong El Nino can temporarily add around another 0.3C to the planet's average temperature for about a year, Vialard said. That additional warming is temporary, unlike the longer-term rise caused by humans.

Scientists have not yet reached a consensus on whether climate change is making El Nino itself more intense. The evidence is clearer, however, when it comes to its consequences.

“There is currently a scientific consensus on one point: the effects of El Nino in terms of rainfall, flooding and drought are becoming stronger **and will become stronger in the future,**” Vialard said.

Article link: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/environment/20260912-before-its-peak-el-nino-brings-failed-crops-and-empty-fishing-nets>