



CVF
V20

SCIENCE
BULLETIN

EL NIÑO IS NOW NEAR CERTAIN TO BE VERY STRONG

WITH A REAL CHANCE OF BECOMING
THE STRONGEST ON RECORD



BULLETIN NO. 4
19 August 2026

Office of the Chief Scientist
CVF-V20 Secretariat

BOTTOM LINE

El Niño is now near certain to be very strong, and there is a meaningful chance that it becomes the strongest event in the modern record. In its 13 August 2026 discussion, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports a **greater than 90 percent chance of a very strong El Niño** during the Northern Hemisphere fall and winter of 2026 to 2027.¹ More striking, NOAA now assigns a 69 percent chance of a historic event that would exceed every El Niño since 1950, defined as a three-month Relative Oceanic Niño Index at or above $+2.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ during October to December.¹ The July Niño-3.4 index reached $+1.4^{\circ}\text{C}$ and the eastern Pacific Niño-1+2 index $+2.9^{\circ}\text{C}$, with subsurface temperature anomalies as high as $+10^{\circ}\text{C}$ at depth.¹ The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reached the same conclusion in its August assessment, expecting seasonal sea surface temperature anomalies above $+2.9^{\circ}\text{C}$ and a reinforcing positive Indian Ocean Dipole.² For CVF-V20 members, the planning question is no longer whether a high-end event will arrive. It is how to manage an event that may have no analog in the instrumental record, at a peak that now sits only weeks away.

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE SCIENCE BULLETIN NO. 3

The escalation has continued, and it has crossed an important threshold.

The very strong outcome is now all but locked in. NOAA's **greater than 90 percent** probability replaces the 81 percent figure of July, and the trajectory across four monthly updates, from roughly 25 percent in May to 63 percent in June to 81 percent in July to more than 90 percent in August, has moved in one direction throughout.¹ The genuinely new element this month is the **69 percent chance of a historic event above the $+2.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ threshold**.¹ That is a different category of risk from the one we have been describing. It means the central planning case is no longer the 2015 to 2016 analog but an event that could exceed it.



The ocean has continued to warm with July Niño-3.4 index rising to +1.4°C from +1.2°C, the eastern Pacific Niño-1+2 index to +2.9°C from +2.7°C, and subsurface anomalies reached +10°C at depth as the thermocline deepened.¹ The Southern Oscillation Index sat near two standard deviations below normal during July, confirming that the atmosphere is now strongly coupled to the ocean.¹

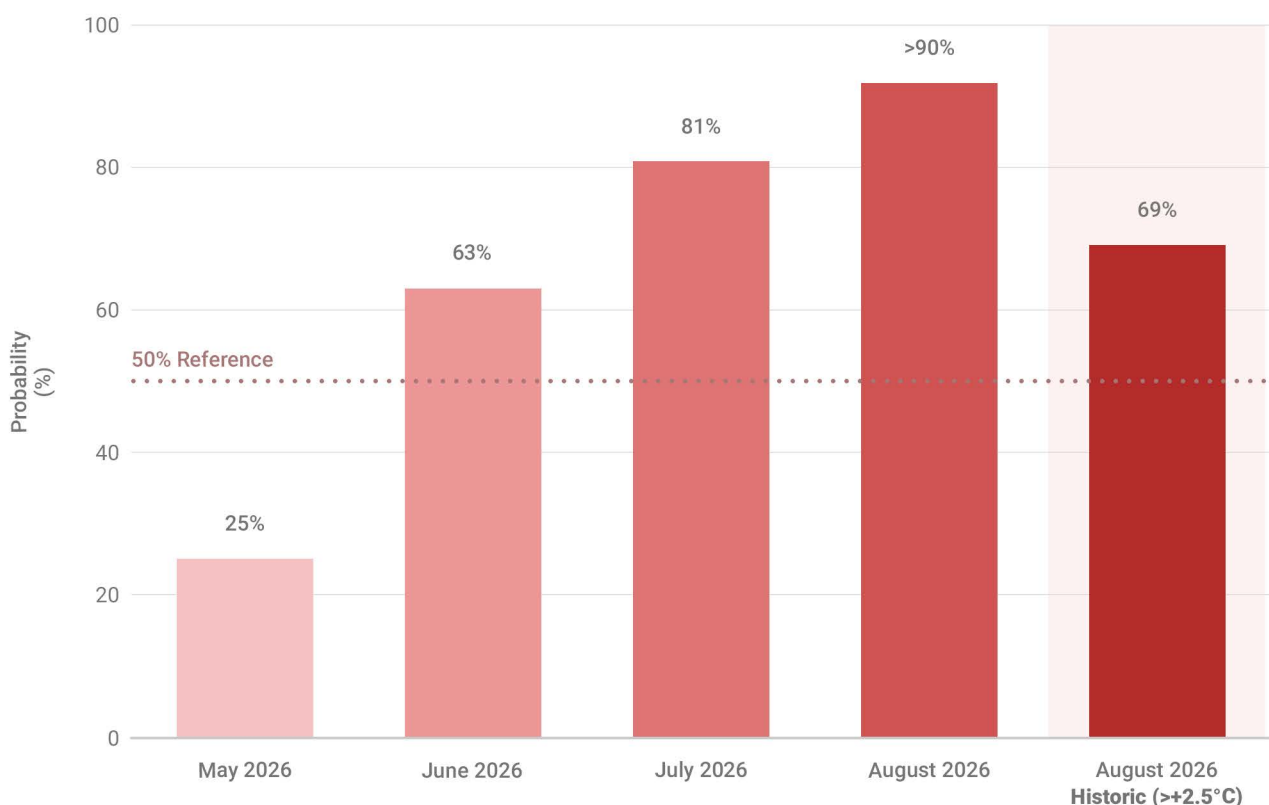
The WMO has moved in step. Its August update expects El Niño to intensify into a strong event during August to October, with seasonal average sea surface temperature anomalies exceeding +2.9°C in key monitoring regions and a positive

Indian Ocean Dipole reinforcing the signal.² The WMO warns that these two ocean drivers together can amplify drought, floods and wildfire risk, particularly around the Indian Ocean basin. NOAA and the WMO are now fully aligned on both direction and magnitude.

As before, "very strong" is NOAA's formal category for a Niño-3.4 anomaly above +2.0°C on the Relative Oceanic Niño Index, and "super El Niño" is the informal public synonym.³ The next NOAA discussion is scheduled for 10 September 2026, and the WMO will issue its full El Niño update in early September.

**FIGURE 1:
NOAA "VERY STRONG" EL NIÑO PROBABILITY ACROSS THE MAY TO AUGUST 2026
OUTLOOKS, WITH THE 13 AUGUST 69 PERCENT CHANCE OF A HISTORIC EVENT
(THREE-MONTH RONI AT OR ABOVE +2.5°C).**

Bars 1 to 4: probability of a "very strong" El Niño (Niño-3.4 above + 2.0°C) in successive NOAA monthly outlooks. Final bar: the 13 August 2026 outlook's 69% chance of a historic event (three-month RONI at or above +2.5°C) exceeding any El Niño since 1950.



Sources: NOAA CPC ENSO Diagnostic Discussions.

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EXPECTED REGIONAL IMPACTS ON CVF-V20 MEMBERS

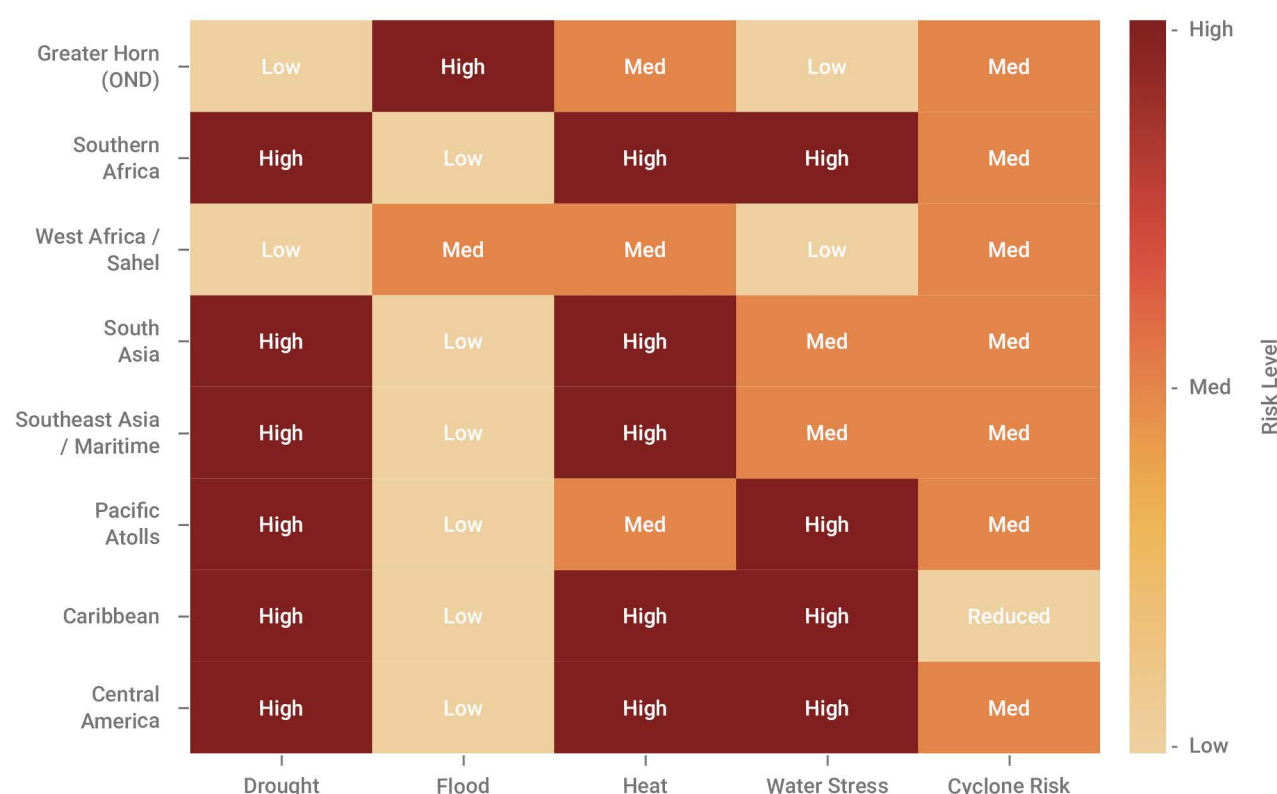
Members should read this brief alongside the CVF-V20 Regional Climate Outlook Digest, whose updated edition of 18 August 2026 carries the tailored seasonal outlooks from the WMO Regional Climate Outlook Forums serving each region. Two developments since July are worth drawing out here.

First, the highest-priority pending outlook for the Greater Horn has now been issued, and it points to flooding rather than drought. At GHACOF74, convened in Kigali on 17 to 18 August 2026, the

convened in Kigali on 17 to 18 August 2026, the region's climate center and national meteorological services released the October to December outlook, indicating an increased likelihood of wetter-than-normal conditions across the region as El Niño strengthens and a positive Indian Ocean Dipole develops.⁴ The forecast assigns a 90 percent chance of enhanced rainfall over southern Ethiopia, central to southern Somalia and northeastern Kenya, with seasonal totals that could exceed 400 mm in parts of Somalia, central Kenya, the Lake Victoria basin, Burundi, western Rwanda and western Tanzania.⁴ The reference years, 1997 and 2023, both produced major short-rains flooding. Because the October to December season supplies up to 70 percent of annual rainfall in parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, what earlier briefs carried as a tendency is now the issued consensus forecast, and flood, flash-flood and landslide contingency plans in the short-rains belt should move from planning to implementation.

**FIGURE 2:
EXPECTED HAZARD PROFILE ACROSS CVF-V20 REGIONS
IN A VERY STRONG EL NIÑO (2026 TO 2027).**

Qualitative scale (Low, Med, High) based on the issued regional outlooks and the 1997-98 and 2015-16 events. The Greater Horn row reflects the GHACOF74 October to December outlook (wetter, flood risk).



Source: Synthesis by Office of the Chief Scientist, CVF-V20, drawing on NOAA, WMO, BoM, GHACOF74, and peer-reviewed literature.

Second, the highest-stakes pending outlook for Southern Africa is now days away. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat has confirmed that the Thirty-Third Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF-33) will be convened in Swakopmund, Namibia, from 25 to 28 August 2026, preceded by a climate experts meeting.⁵ Until it is issued, the established El Niño tendency for the subregion is below-normal rainfall and elevated drought risk across Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana and southern Madagascar, the pattern that in 2015 to 2016 left an estimated 40 million people acutely food insecure and cut regional maize yields by around

15 percent.⁶ The Secretariat will circulate the SARCOF-33 outlook as soon as it is released.

Elsewhere, the picture set out in Version 3 holds. South Asia faces a below-normal monsoon, the Maritime Continent below-normal rainfall with heightened heat and haze, the Pacific atoll states a drier belt from Tuvalu east to the Marquesas where drinking-water security should be the first-order priority, and the Caribbean suppressed Atlantic hurricane activity alongside elevated heat and drought. The Sahel outlook remains, on its issuing forum's own assessment, not attributable to El Niño this year and should be read on its own terms.

FISCAL AND LOSS-AND- DAMAGE IMPLICATIONS

The fiscal case is strengthened by the move into historic-event territory. A peer-reviewed assessment estimated cumulative global losses of approximately US\$3.9 trillion from the 2015 to 2016 event over the following years, equivalent to roughly 4 to 5 percent of global GDP at the time, with the burden falling disproportionately on developing economies.⁷ An event that exceeds 2015 to 2016, which NOAA now gives better-than-even odds of occurring, would carry a correspondingly larger bill, and it would arrive as many members already face tripled debt-service burdens and constrained fiscal space.

A note on attribution, directly relevant to the financing case. It would overstate the science to claim that warming caused this El Niño or intensified the Pacific warming itself, and our communications should not assert otherwise. The IPCC finds no model consensus that anthropogenic forcing has changed the amplitude of El Niño sea surface temperature swings.⁸ The defensible and stronger claim is that the event is unfolding on a baseline that warming has already made roughly 1.3 to 1.5°C hotter than pre-industrial, so the absolute heat, marine heatwaves and temperature records during the event are human-caused even where the El Niño rhythm itself is natural, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assesses it as very likely that the rainfall extremes that define strong El Niños will intensify in a warming world.⁸ This shifts the event from a purely natural act of God toward a natural cycle whose harms are foreseeably

amplified by emissions for which our members bear little responsibility, which is the stronger foundation for concessional finance, debt relief and Loss and Damage claims. Because the global temperature response lags the Pacific peak by about three months, the larger effect of this event will land in 2027, which would then be the strong favorite to set a new global temperature record directly into the COP31 cycle.⁹ The forthcoming CVF-V20 statement to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Annual Meetings in Bangkok develops these asks in full.

RECOMMEN- DED ACTIONS FOR MEMBER STATES OVER THE NEXT 90 DAYS

The runway to the October to December peak is now measured in weeks, and the recommendations from our July brief become more urgent still. CVF-V20 members are encouraged to:

1. Adopt an event at or beyond the 2015 to 2016 magnitude as the central planning scenario, recognizing that NOAA now assigns better-than-even odds to a historic event that would exceed it.
2. Move flood as well as drought preparations to implementation. In the Greater Horn short-rains belt, the issued GHACOF74

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outlook calls for wetter-than-normal conditions, so pre-position for flood, flash flood, and landslide response, while Southern African members prepare for the drought tendency pending SARCOF-33.

3. Pre-position water storage, seed stocks and essential medicines in high-risk subnational zones before the peak, with atoll states prioritizing drinking-water security.
4. Pre-arrange contingent liquidity now rather than relying on post-disaster appeals, and accelerate pending applications to the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund, and the Loss and Damage Fund ahead of the Bangkok meetings.
5. Communicate clearly that an El Niño Advisory is in effect, that a very strong event is now near certain, and that a record-breaking event is a real possibility at 69 percent, while continuing to note that local impacts remain variable.

WHAT THE CVF-V20 SECRETARIAT WILL DO

The Office of the Chief Scientist will issue its next technical update following the NOAA El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Diagnostic Discussion scheduled for **10 September 2026**, and will incorporate the WMO full El Niño update due in early September. We will circulate the SARCOF-33 outlook for Southern Africa as soon as it is released after 28 August, together with a further update of the Regional Climate Outlook Digest. Fiscal implications of the event will be circulated ahead of the IMF and World Bank Annual Meetings in Bangkok in October 2026 to reflect the historic-event outlook.

Questions on this brief should be directed to the Office of the Chief Scientist and Science Advisor at kq@cvfv20.org and sgoffice_ml@cvfv20.org, respectively, copied to secretariat@cvfv20.org.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ NOAA Climate Prediction Center, ENSO Diagnostic Discussion, 13 August 2026. [El Niño Advisory](#); greater than 90 percent chance of a very strong event during NH fall and winter 2026 to 2027; 69 percent chance of a historic event (three-month RONI at or above +2.5°C) during October to December; July Niño-3.4 +1.4°C, Niño-3 +1.7°C, Niño-1+2 +2.9°C; subsurface anomaly to +10°C; next discussion 10 September 2026.
- ² World Meteorological Organization, ["Strong El Niño expected to intensify,"](#) 31 July 2026, and the Global Seasonal Climate Update for August to October 2026 (seasonal SST anomalies above +2.9°C; positive Indian Ocean Dipole; full El Niño update due early September).
- ³ NOAA Climate Prediction Center, [ENSO forecast strength probabilities and RONI outlook.](#)
- ⁴ ICPAC, [GHACOF74 outlook for October to December 2026](#), Kigali, 17 to 18 August 2026 (wetter than normal; 90 percent chance of enhanced rainfall over southern Ethiopia, central to southern Somalia and northeastern Kenya).
- ⁵ SADC Secretariat, [announcement of SARCOF-33, Swakopmund, Namibia](#), 25 to 28 August 2026.
- ⁶ AGRA, ["Drought Crisis in Southern Africa: The 2015 to 2016 El Niño-induced drought."](#)
- ⁷ Nature Communications, ["Nonlinear El Niño impacts on the global economy under climate change"](#) (2023); see also Callahan and Mankin, ["Persistent effect of El Niño on global economic growth,"](#) Science 380 (2023).
- ⁸ IPCC, [Sixth Assessment Report, Working Group I](#), Chapter 4 (no model consensus on systematic change in ENSO SST amplitude; very likely increase in ENSO rainfall variability).
- ⁹ Carbon Brief, ["State of the climate: Strong El Niño puts 2026 on track for second-warmest year,"](#) Z. Hausfather, 21 April 2026.





 Africa Trade House,
Ambassadorial Enclave,
Liberia Road,
Accra, Ghana

 www.cvf20.org
 secretariat@cvfv20.org
 [climatevulnerableforum&v20](https://www.linkedin.com/company/climatevulnerableforum&v20)

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