WEATHER CLIMATE WATER

WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

El Niño/La Niña Update

FEBRUARY 2026

Current Situation and Outlook

As of mid-February 2026, sea surface temperatures, alongside key atmospheric and oceanic indicators in the tropical Pacific, reveal that the recent weak La Niña conditions are fading and shifting toward ENSO-neutral. According to the latest WMO Global Producing Centres forecasts, there is a 60% chance of ENSO-neutral conditions during March–May 2026, compared with a 30% probability of La Niña continuing and a 10% chance of El Niño developing. ENSO-neutral conditions are the most likely outcome during April–June (around 70% chance) and May–July (around 60% chance). The chance of El Niño increases steadily from April–June (around 30%) to May–July (around 40%). The re-development of La Niña remains unlikely in the extended outlook. However, uncertainty is high at longer lead times, and forecasts made at this time of year tend to be less reliable. Accordingly, these probabilities should be interpreted as guidance and treated with caution, especially in light of the lower predictability characteristic of the boreal spring transition. National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) will closely monitor changes in the state of ENSO over the coming months and provide updated outlooks as needed.

By mid-February 2026, sea surface temperatures in the central-eastern equatorial Pacific had started to move away from La Niña levels. Warmer subsurface temperatures have shifted eastward, reaching the far eastern Pacific and contributing to the emergence of warmer surface temperatures there. However, the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) recorded a value of +9.9 in January 2026, with its most recent 30-day values still remaining within the La Niña range. The trade winds have been near normal in recent weeks. Recent outgoing longwave radiation (OLR) data indicate near-normal cloudiness across the International Date Line, consistent with the weakening of cooler SSTs. Collectively, key oceanic and atmospheric indicators suggest that weak La Niña conditions still persist in the equatorial Pacific but are gradually weakening.

WMO Global Producing Centres for Seasonal Prediction routinely issue global-scale climate forecasts for the coming months, using dynamical models initialized with recent observations. The latest forecasts and expert assessments indicate a 60% chance of ENSO-neutral conditions in the central–eastern equatorial Pacific during March–May 2026. The chance of La Niña is estimated at 30% and of El Niño at 10%. Beyond March–May, ENSO-neutral conditions remain the most likely category through April–June (around 70%) and May–July (around 60%), while the probability of El Niño increases to about 30% and 40%, respectively. The re-development of La Niña remains unlikely in the extended outlook. Forecast confidence is lower at this time of year due to the boreal spring predictability barrier, when ENSO signals are inherently harder to predict. Long-lead ENSO outlooks therefore

carry substantial uncertainty, reflected in the widespread among tropical Pacific sea surface temperature forecasts across models and their ensemble members.

It is important to note that El Niño and La Niña are not the only factors that drive global and regional climate patterns, and further that the magnitudes of ENSO indicators do not directly correspond to the magnitudes of their impacts. At the regional level, seasonal outlooks need to assess the relative effects of both the ENSO state and other locally-relevant climate drivers. Regionally and locally applicable information is made available via regional and national seasonal climate outlooks, such as those produced by WMO Regional Climate Centres (RCCs), Regional Climate Outlook Forums (RCOFs) and National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs).

In summary

- As of mid-February 2026, weak La Niña conditions are declining across the tropical Pacific.
- Model predictions and expert assessments indicate that ENSO-neutral conditions are likely until early boreal summer, with probabilities of 60% in March–May, rising to around 70% in April–June, and easing to near 60% in May–July.
- During March–May 2026, La Niña has a 30% probability, while El Niño remains less likely at 10%.
- The likelihood of El Niño developing increases steadily, rising to around 30% in April–June and 40% in May–July.
- Re-development of La Niña is unlikely throughout the extended forecast period.

The state of ENSO will continue to be carefully monitored by WMO Members and partners. More detailed interpretations of the implications for regional climate variability will be carried out routinely by the climate forecasting community over the coming months and will be made available through the NMHSs.

- For the latest Global Seasonal Climate Update (GSCU) based on WMO Global Producing Centres for Seasonal Prediction, please visit: https://www.wmolc.org/gscuBoard/list
- An archive of all WMO El Niño/La Niña Updates issued so far, including this one, is available here.

Acknowledgements

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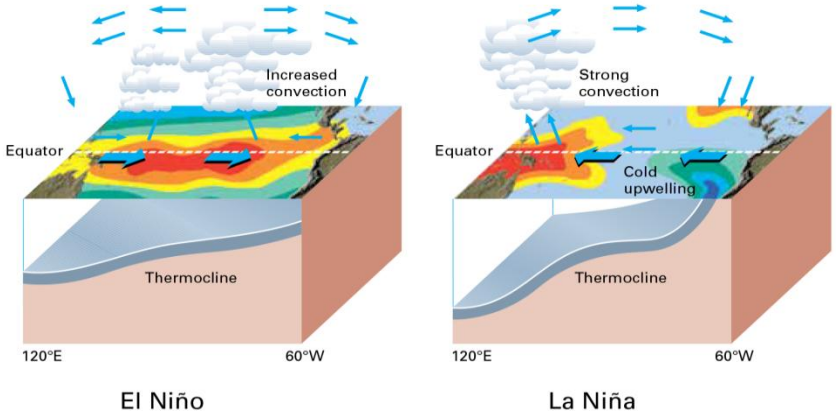
El Niño/La Niña Background



Typical circulation patterns during El Niño/La Niña (Source: WMO, 2003, "Climate into the 21st Century").

Climate Patterns in the Pacific

Research conducted over recent decades has shed considerable light on the important role played by interactions between the atmosphere and ocean in the tropical belt of the Pacific Ocean in altering global weather and climate patterns. During El Niño events, sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean become substantially warmer than normal. In contrast, during La Niña events, the sea surface temperatures in these regions become colder than normal. These temperature changes are strongly linked to major climate fluctuations around the globe and, once initiated, such events can last for 12 months or more. The strong El Niño event of 1997–1998 was followed by a prolonged La Niña phase that extended from mid-1998 to early 2001. El Niño/La Niña events change the likelihood of particular climate patterns around the globe, but the outcomes of each event are never exactly the same. Furthermore, while there is generally a relationship between the global impacts of an El Niño/La Niña event and its intensity, there is always potential for an event to generate serious impacts in some regions irrespective of its intensity.

Forecasting and Monitoring the El Niño/La Niña Phenomenon

The forecasting of Pacific Ocean developments is undertaken in a number of ways. Complex dynamical models project the evolution of the tropical Pacific Ocean from its currently observed state. Statistical forecast models can also capture some of the precursors of such developments. Expert analysis of the current situation adds further value, especially in interpreting the implications of the evolving situation below the ocean surface. All forecast methods try to incorporate the effects of ocean-atmosphere interactions within the climate system. The meteorological and oceanographic data that allow El Niño and La Niña episodes to be monitored and forecast are drawn from national and international observing systems. The exchange and processing of the data are carried out under programmes coordinated by the WMO.

WMO El Niño/La Niña Update

The WMO El Niño/La Niña Update is prepared on a quasi-regular basis (approximately every three months) through a collaborative effort between WMO and the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) as a contribution to the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Natural Disaster Reduction. It is based on contributions from the leading centres around the world monitoring and predicting this phenomenon and expert consensus facilitated by WMO and IRI.

For more information on the Update and related aspects, please visit: https://wmo.int/publication-series/el-ninola-nina-updates.