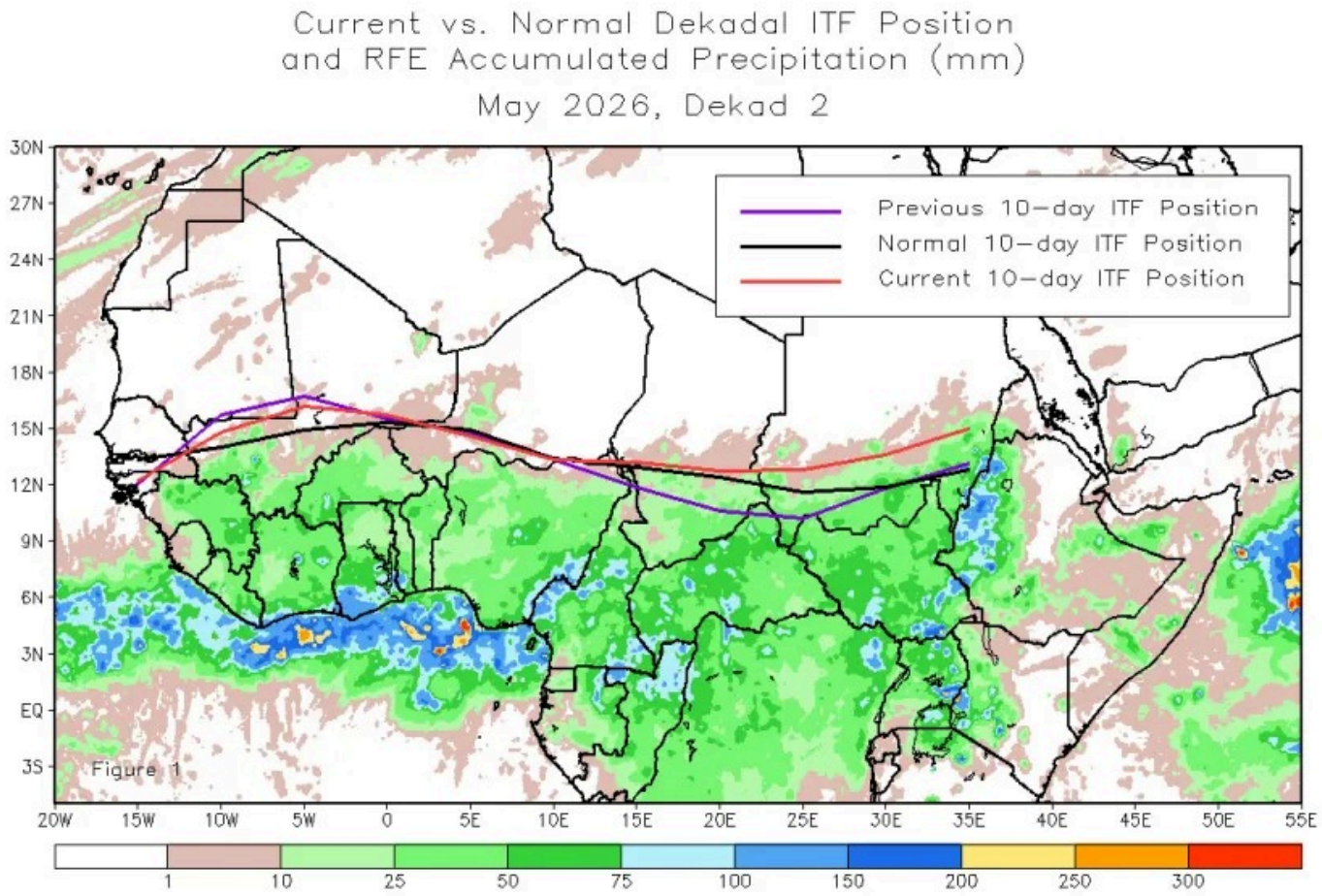
Season begins normally with mostly average to above-average rainfall in bimodal areas

Key Messages

- The ITF (Intertropical Front) continued its northward migration over the region.
- March through May total rainfall is mostly average to above-average in the bimodal areas.
- The 2026 rainy season is gradually starting over the Sudano-Guinean zone of West Africa.
- Climate model forecasts indicate high chances of above-normal temperatures and mixed rainfall conditions across West Africa during the June to September rainy season.

Figure 1

ITF position and RFE accumulated precipitation (mm), May 2026, Dekad 2



Source: NOAA CPC

FEWS NET West Africa
westafrica@fews.net
fews.net/west-africa

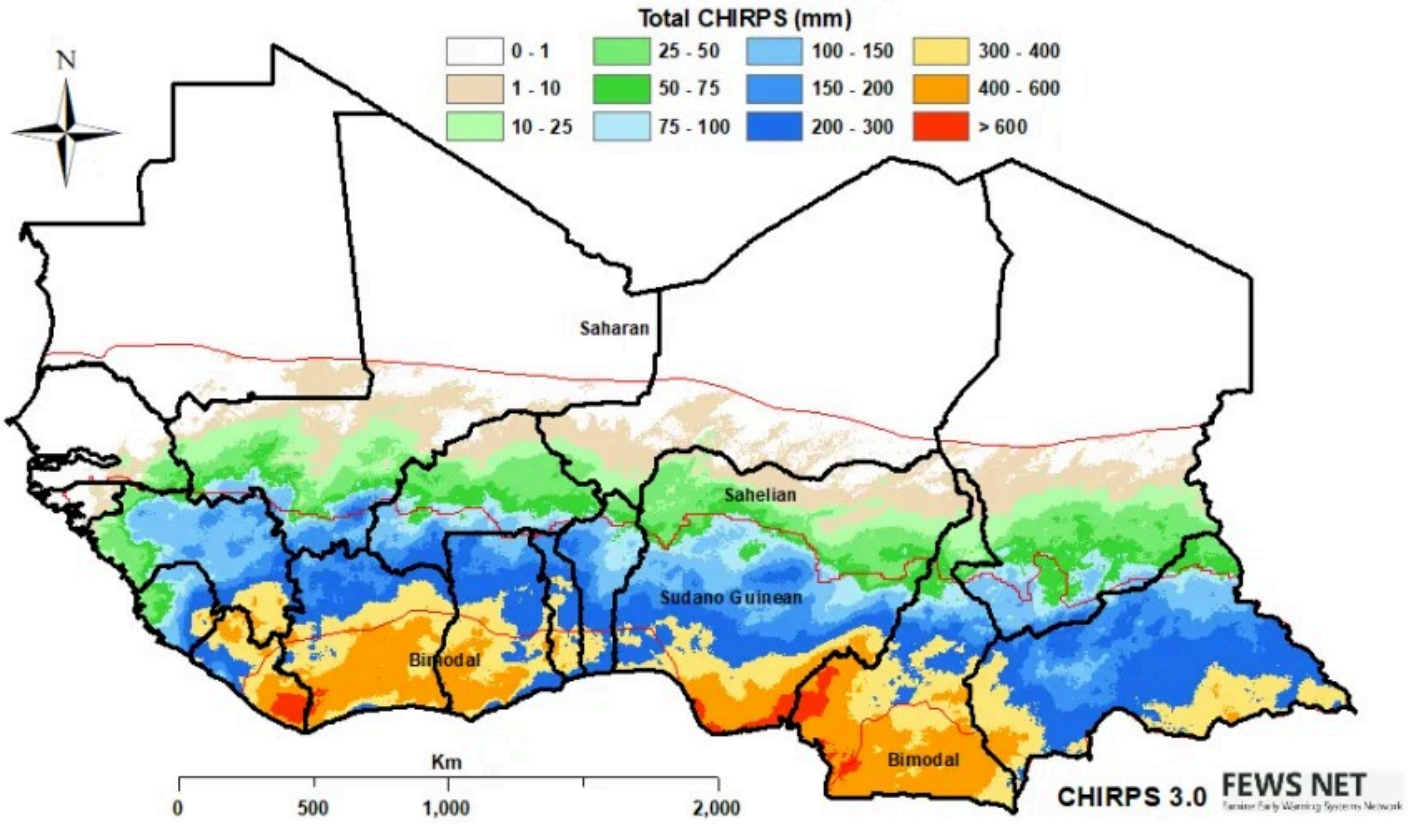
Update on Seasonal Progress

The ITF northward migration started in early March and is now positioned between 13.5° and 14.9° north from 11th to 20th May. This was approximately 0.4° to 1.3° north of its climatological average over the whole region. However, during the second dekad of May, the ITF shifted southward compared to its previous position in the western half of the region (**Figure 1**).

Most areas in the Gulf of Guinea countries have received up to 300 mm of rainfall, while bimodal areas have received between 300 mm and more than 600 mm. However, rainfall totals remain below 75 mm in the Sahelian band, as the season is starting there (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2

March dekad 1– May dekad 2, 2026 CHIRPS total (mm)

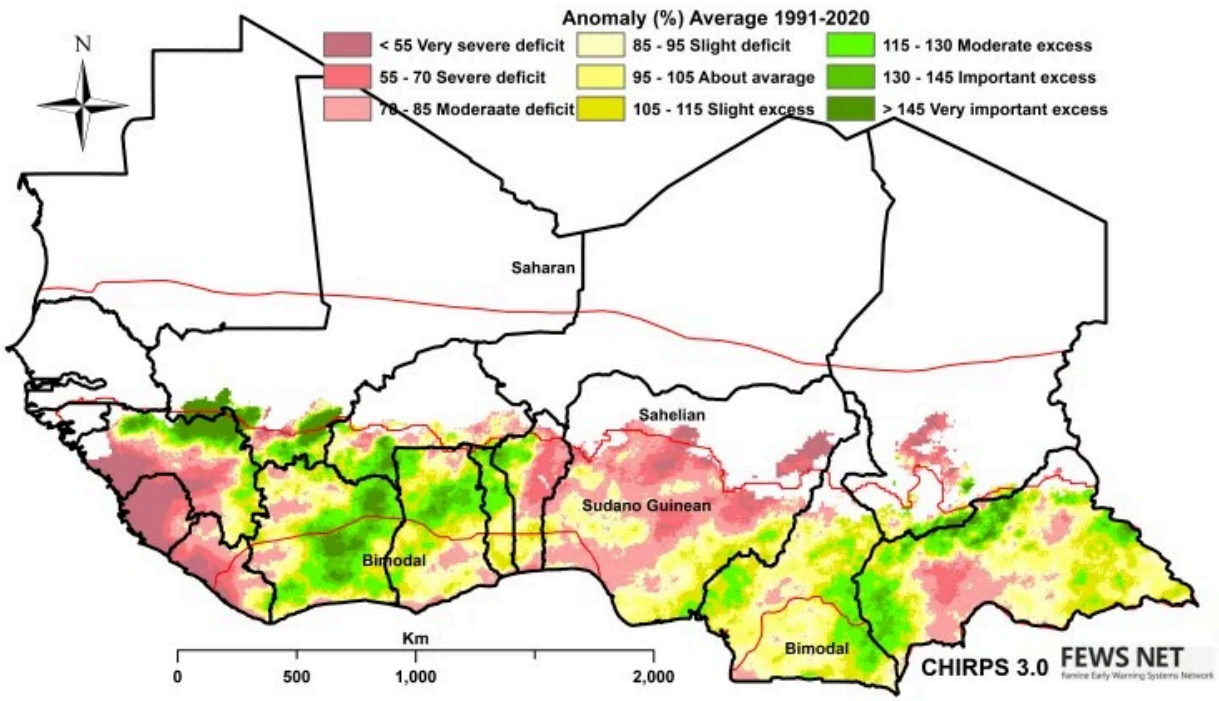


Source: USGS/FEWS NET

There is a moderate to severe deficit across western Guinea, Sierra Leone, central and western Liberia, northwestern Côte d'Ivoire, southeastern Ghana, northeastern Benin, central Nigeria, and the western Central African Republic, where the season has begun (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3

March dekad 1– May dekad 2, 2026 CHIRPS total anomaly (% of average)



Source: USGS/FEWS NET

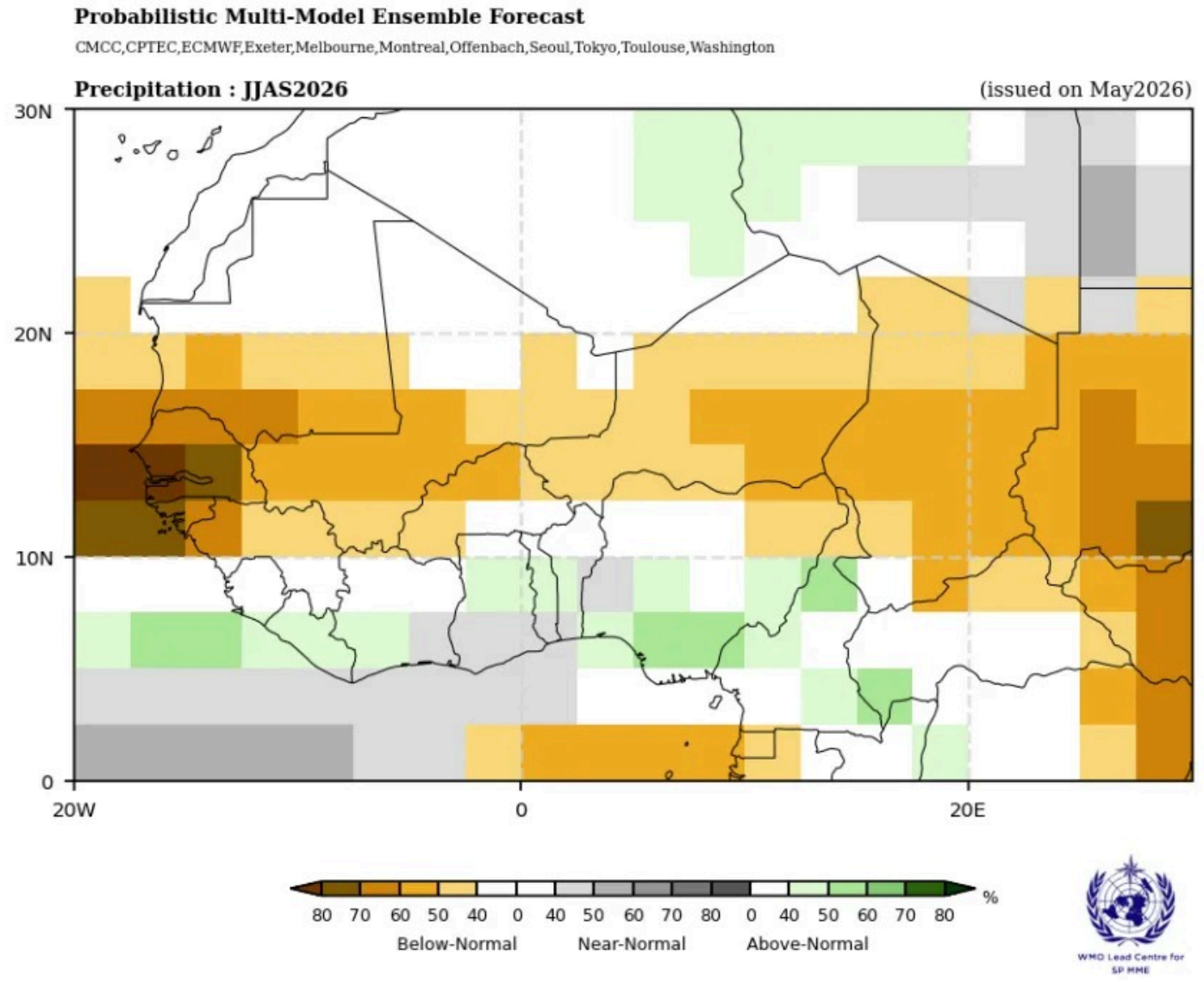
Forecasts

Current ENSO neutral conditions are forecast to transition to El Niño, with 82% chances of El Niño developing during May to July 2026, according to the **May 2026 NOAA CPC ENSO outlook**.

Historically, El Niño events are associated with elevated chances of below-normal June through September (JJAS) rainfall across the Sahel. In line with this, climate model forecasts, the **WMO** (Figure 4) and **C3S**, indicate a regional rainfall pattern with a higher likelihood of below-normal JJAS rainfall across the Sahel and average to above-average rainfall across many Gulf of Guinea countries. In contrast, the **NMME precipitation forecasts** indicate a drier-than-average Gulf of Guinea region and a wetter-than-average central-eastern Sahel. Rainfall Forecast divergence is likely due to the different model interpretations of El Niño's influence on the West African summer monsoon. Given the forecast divergence and the potentially significant implications for agriculture, water resources, and food security, continued monitoring of seasonal forecast updates and observed rainfall conditions will be important in the coming months.

Figure 4

Cumulative JJAS 2026 precipitation forecasts (WMO)

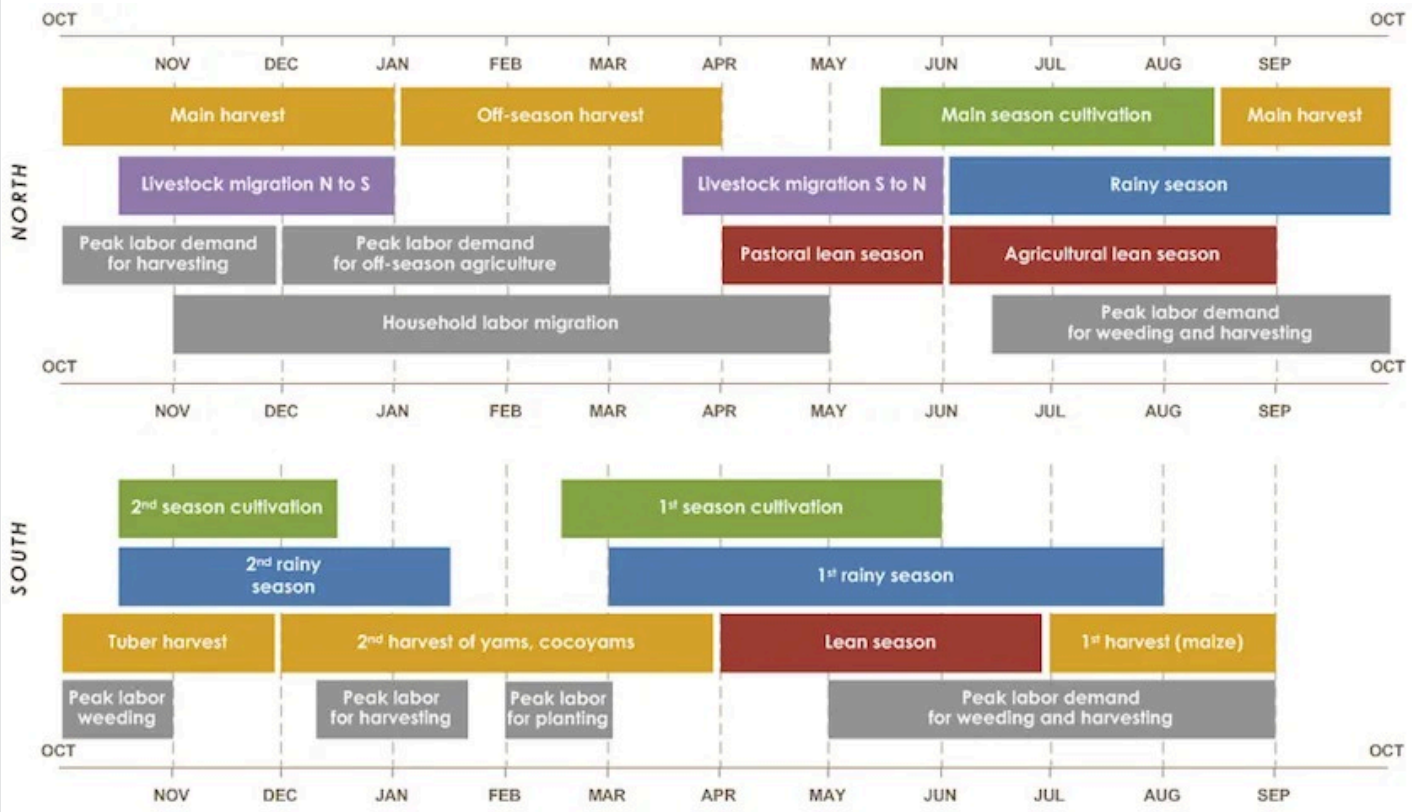


Source: WMO

Across the region, climate models (**NMME**, **WMO**, **C3S**) confidently project above-normal JJAS 2026 temperatures. Close monitoring of conditions will be important as hot and dry conditions could increase the risk of crop heat stress.

According to the **NMME streamflow forecasts** and GloFAS, May through August remains in the low-flow season and is less likely to experience flooding in the region. However, extended forecasts suggest a likelihood of flooding in western coastal countries, central Mali, and northern Nigeria during the September–October period. There is considerable uncertainty associated with this outlook due to the long-range nature of the forecasts.

Seasonal Calendar in a Typical Year



Source: FEWS NET

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Seasonal Monitor

FEWS NET's Seasonal Monitor reports are produced for Central America and the Caribbean, West Africa, East Africa, Central Asia, and Somalia every 10-to-30 days during the region's respective rainy season(s). Seasonal Monitors report updates on weather events (e.g., rainfall patterns) and associated impacts on ground conditions (e.g., cropping conditions, pasture and water availability), as well as the short-term rainfall forecast. Find more remote sensing information **here**.