

Alert Note

El Salvador: Meteorological and agricultural drought in the context of the El Niño phenomenon, 13 October 2026.

Completed by: Christian Association for Education and Development (ALFALIT) and Salvadoran Lutheran Synod (SLS).

Date completed: 13 October 2026

Forum: ACT El Salvador Forum

Type of emergency: Drought (slow onset emergency), in the context of the El Niño phenomenon

1. Nature of the emergency
El Salvador is facing a slow-onset emergency caused by meteorological and agricultural drought, characterised by cumulative rainfall deficits, prolonged dry spells and extreme temperatures, affecting agricultural and livestock production, water availability, food security and rural livelihoods, particularly in the Dry Corridor. Three episodes of meteorological drought were recorded during 2026, including one beginning on 7 August that lasted up to 19 consecutive dry days. In August, accumulated national rainfall was 134.9 mm, compared with a historical average of 313.6 mm, equivalent to a 57% deficit, the most severe for that month since 1971. The severity of the situation prompted the declaration of a Red Alert for meteorological and agricultural drought on 25 August 2026 and, subsequently, the Legislative Assembly's approval of a six-month State of National Emergency on 7 October 2026. Food insecurity is an additional concern: the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, published in June 2026, projected that approximately 157,000 people (23% of the population analysed) would face acute food insecurity at Phase 3 or above between July and October in the tri-national border area of the Lempa River, shared by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The activation of an immediate humanitarian response is justified by cumulative agricultural losses, declining incomes and the progressive depletion of food reserves among affected households, as the dry season approaches. The emergency declaration of 7 October, together with needs identified through the ACT El Salvador Forum's territorial assessments, provides the basis for a timely and targeted intervention to prevent further deterioration in food security, access to water and livelihoods among the prioritised families. The intervention will focus on vulnerable communities in territories prioritised by the ACT Forum, mainly in the eastern and central-eastern parts of the country, where damage to agricultural production and rural livelihoods is exacerbating household food insecurity.
2. Impact and scale of the emergency
The 2026 drought has significantly affected rural communities in El Salvador's Dry Corridor, especially families dependent on subsistence farming, staple crop production and agricultural day labour. Although its effects extend nationwide, the ACT El Salvador Forum proposes a targeted, medium-scale humanitarian response for communities with the greatest needs and limited capacity to recover. Needs assessments conducted during 2026 show deteriorating livelihoods and food security. The rapid assessment by Oxfam and partner organisations, conducted between July and August, covered 718 households in five departments: Ahuachapán, La Libertad, Morazán, San Miguel and Usulután. The ACT El Salvador Forum's Needs Assessment, conducted in October 2026, collected information from 187 households in 44 communities, identifying crop losses, reduced income, difficulties accessing food and water, and harmful coping strategies, including reducing meals, taking on debt and selling assets.¹ Among surveyed respondents who answered questions on crop losses, 55% reported total losses; likewise, 77.5% indicated that drought had severely affected their ability to obtain income or food. These findings provide direct evidence of needs in the

¹ACT El Salvador Forum. (October 2026). Analysis and interpretation of the results of the drought and climate conditions needs assessment survey.

assessed territories, although, because the sample was non-probabilistic, they cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of the departments.

The impact is particularly severe for low-income rural households, small-scale producers and families dependent on agricultural day labour who have lost their crops and have no food reserves or alternative income. Women heading households and women agricultural producers face greater difficulties because of inequalities in access to resources and caregiving responsibilities, while girls, boys, pregnant and breastfeeding women, older people and persons with disabilities face differentiated risks as food intake, access to water and health conditions deteriorate. Economic pressures and the depletion of household resources may also increase risks of gender-based violence and the need for psychosocial support.

Under these circumstances, the ACT El Salvador Forum plans to prioritise 800 families (3,200 people), estimated to include 1,760 women (55%) and 1,440 men (45%), according to criteria related to drought impacts, food insecurity, socioeconomic vulnerability and recovery capacity. Geographic targeting will be based on identifying affected communities in La Paz, San Miguel, Usulután, Chalatenango, Morazán, La Unión, Sonsonate and Santa Ana, taking into account available community records and the Forum organisations' presence in the territories. Selection will be informed by needs assessments, community presence and identification of households facing the greatest difficulties in coping with the emergency. In the short term, the intervention seeks to help safeguard families' food consumption, access to water and well-being; in the medium term, it aims to prevent further depletion of their assets and livelihoods.

3. Local and national capacity

Rural households affected by the drought have increasingly limited coping capacity. According to the ACT El Salvador Forum's needs assessment, conducted in the departments of Morazán, San Miguel, La Unión, La Paz, Santa Ana and Sonsonate, 68.1% of surveyed households sought alternative income sources, 25.8% reduced the quantity or frequency of meals, 24.2% used savings or incurred debt, and 14.0% sold livestock, tools or other assets.² These strategies demonstrate worsening food security and the risk of progressive loss of livelihoods.

At community level, support structures include Community Development Associations (ADESCO), water management boards, producer organisations, churches and local Civil Protection commissions, which help identify needs and facilitate assistance. The ACT El Salvador Forum also has a presence in the territories, community relationships and an Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP), updated in July 2026. In the prioritised territories, the requesting organisations have community ties and coordination arrangements with ADESCO, churches, local leaders, municipal authorities and government institutions, including the National Centre for Agricultural and Forestry Technology (CENTA), the Ministry of Governance and Territorial Development, and local Civil Protection structures. However, these capacities require additional resources to meet the needs of affected households.

At government level, the [National Civil Protection System](#) coordinates preparedness and response activities through its national and territorial structures. The Red Alert of 25 August and the [State of National Emergency](#) of 7 October 2026 established measures to assess damage, protect food security and mobilise assistance. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) has also implemented productive support programmes and targeted food distributions. In some prioritised communities, technical assistance from CENTA has been reported, although this does not include targeted humanitarian assistance for drought-affected households. Nevertheless, the available information does not allow the overall coverage of these actions to be determined or establish whether they reach all households that have lost crops or lack resources to recover.

The international humanitarian response includes anticipatory action mechanisms and targeted assistance. These include USD 2.5 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to protect up to 20,000 people in Ahuachapán and Santa Ana; allocations from the Regional Humanitarian Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean for food assistance; and activities by the Salvadoran Red Cross targeting around 10,000 people in Morazán and La Unión. These

²Ibid.

interventions provide relevant capacity but have specific geographic, population and time coverage, so they cannot be assumed to address all needs identified by the ACT Forum.

National coordination is organised through the National Civil Protection System and, internationally, through the Humanitarian Country Team, with the participation of United Nations agencies and humanitarian organisations in sectors such as food security, WASH, health and protection. In this context, the response proposed by the ACT El Salvador Forum, through ALFALIT and the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod, seeks to complement existing activities and address unmet needs in prioritised communities through a targeted intervention coordinated with the relevant territorial mechanisms.

The requesting organisations will establish internal coordination mechanisms to harmonise family targeting, avoid duplication and complement response activities in the prioritised territories.

4. Main needs and gaps

The main needs identified in drought-affected communities concern food security, access to safe water, psychosocial well-being and protection. The ACT El Salvador Forum's needs assessment shows a significant deterioration in livelihoods: 55.0% of those responding to questions about agricultural losses reported losing their entire crops, 16.1% were unable to plant, and 77.5% reported substantial impacts on their ability to obtain food or income. In addition, 118 households indicated that they had staple food reserves sufficient for one week or less. These findings highlight the urgency of facilitating access to food and resources to meet essential needs, in line with the principles of the [Sphere Standards](#).

Regarding water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), 23.1% of surveyed respondents identified drinking water as a priority need, and 12.9% reported greater difficulties or costs in obtaining it. These conditions call for measures to promote safe access to water, its storage and treatment, as well as appropriate hygiene practices. The Sphere Standards establish a reference minimum of 15 litres of water per person per day for drinking, food preparation and personal hygiene, subject to the specific conditions and needs of the population.

Protection and psychosocial well-being needs are also significant. Of respondents, 40.5% identified worry, anxiety or constant stress among the main household problems; 89.1% reported increased domestic and caregiving responsibilities, and 54.3% reported a permanent or occasional increase in family tensions. These findings justify including psychosocial support and measures to prevent and mitigate risks of gender-based violence (GBV), with particular attention to women, girls and other groups in vulnerable situations, without assuming that such tensions in themselves constitute confirmed cases of violence.

Although government and humanitarian interventions exist in food security, productive support and access to water, their geographic and population coverage is specific. Accordingly, the proposed response will prioritise the 800 families in communities with the most severe impacts and unmet needs, through cash transfers, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions, psychosocial support and prevention of gender-based violence. Geographic and household selection will be based on needs assessments and coordination with other humanitarian actors to avoid duplication. The experience and territorial presence of the requesting organisations indicate favourable preliminary conditions for linking cash transfers with local markets and financial services. Centralised procurement of kits containing essential hygiene and personal care items for women affected by the drought is also planned, through direct purchase in accordance with established procedures and with the participation of the ACT El Salvador Forum's procurement committee.

	Indicate your intention by marking an X below
Rapid Response Fund (<i>for small- and medium-scale emergencies</i>)	X
Appeal (<i>for large-scale emergencies</i>)	

5. Forum capacity and members' intention to respond

ACT member	Geographic focus	Areas of expertise and experience
Salvadoran Lutheran Synod, SLS	Chalatenango, San Miguel, Usulután, La Unión, Morazán	Food security and nutrition; livelihoods and agriculture; multipurpose cash transfers; education; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); psychosocial support.
ALFALIT	La Paz, Morazán, Santa Ana, Sonsonate	Food security and nutrition; livelihoods and agriculture; multipurpose cash transfers; education; WASH; psychosocial support.

In response to the impacts of the drought, the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod and ALFALIT express their intention to request funding from the ACT Alliance Rapid Response Fund (RRF), amounting to USD 150,000 per organisation, for a total of USD 300,000. The joint response expects to reach approximately 800 families (3,200 people) through multipurpose cash transfers, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) assistance, community-based psychosocial support and prevention of gender-based violence, in coordination with community structures and territorial response mechanisms.

6. Possible responses

Based on the needs identified and available capacities, the ACT El Salvador Forum proposes an integrated humanitarian response to address the immediate needs of drought-affected households through four complementary modalities:

- 1. Multipurpose cash transfers (CASH).** Two transfers of USD 100 per family (USD 200 in total) will be provided to help cover basic needs, primarily food, water, hygiene and other priority expenses. This modality will allow families to determine their own spending priorities. Territorial checks conducted by ACT Forum organisations confirm the availability of basic goods in local markets and families' ability to access these outlets, with a lack of financial resources being the main barrier to purchasing these goods.
- 2. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).** Kits containing essential hygiene and personal care items will be distributed to women affected by the drought, addressing their differentiated needs and helping to preserve their health, well-being and dignity.
- 3. Community-based psychosocial support (CBPSS).** Group spaces will be organised for emotional support and identification of psychosocial needs, along with individual assistance or referral to specialised services where appropriate. Activities will prioritise people facing greater emotional distress and vulnerabilities, drawing on the capacities of the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod's (SLS) Trauma Care Centre and possible technical support from the ACT Alliance Psychosocial Support Community of Practice.
- 4. Prevention of gender-based violence (GBV).** Community information, awareness-raising and training activities will address the prevention of violence against women and girls, identification of risks and dissemination of available referral pathways. Safe mechanisms for guidance and referral will be promoted, respecting the principles of confidentiality, protection and non-discrimination.

Implementing these interventions will require timely funding for direct assistance, procurement and distribution of supplies, staff mobilisation, territorial coordination and monitoring of activities. Mechanisms for accountability to affected populations, safeguarding, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) will also be ensured, with the aim of providing a safe, inclusive response coordinated with humanitarian actors present in the prioritised territories.