

# Drought in Europe

## May 2026

*GDO Analytical Report*



PROGRAMME OF THE  
EUROPEAN UNION



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## **Abstract**

Drought conditions are deteriorating in eastern and north-eastern Europe.

Alert conditions emerged in Ukraine and Belarus, with warning conditions in north-eastern Europe and western Russia.

Poor precipitation has been the main driver of the drought, with severe and prolonged deficits observed over eastern and north-eastern Europe, highlighting the significant impact of below-average rainfall on the region's water balance.

Temperature anomalies are severely warmer than average over western Europe, with recent warm spells having affected areas such as the Iberian Peninsula, the Alps, and western France, further exacerbating the heatwave conditions in these areas.

Soil moisture and river flow are below normal, with negative impacts on vegetation and crops.

Crop yield forecasts are mixed, with some countries expecting above-average yields and others below-average yields.

Continued monitoring is needed to assess the full extent of the damage.

Drought is expected to worsen in central-eastern Europe, with warmer and drier conditions forecasted for the next months.

## **Acknowledgements**

We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Copernicus programme and the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS), and the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). We thank A. De Jager, A. Hrast Essenfelder, G. Fioravanti, D. Volpi, L. Acquafresca, A. Ficchi, S. Santos Nunes, M. Mazzeschi, P. Barbosa for their key contributions to the European and global drought observatories of the Copernicus Emergency Management Service.

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# 1. Introduction

The Copernicus Emergency Management Service (CEMS<sup>1</sup>), implemented by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, provides timely and accurate geospatial information on ongoing and forecasted natural hazards and man-made disasters to support decision making and actions. Its products and services support emergency response and disaster management activities, helping to reduce risks and mitigate the impact of disasters and saving lives. CEMS has three components: early warning and monitoring; on-demand mapping; exposure mapping. The early warning and monitoring component focuses on floods, drought, and wildfire.

The European and Global Drought Observatories<sup>2</sup> (EDO and GDO) of CEMS provide drought forecasting and monitoring information, analysis tools and analytical reports. The Observatories aim at detecting, monitoring, and predicting droughts by using a suite of indices and indicators characterising different aspects and phases of drought. In addition, EDO and GDO provide monitoring information and forecasts of warm spells, heatwaves and cold spells. In addition, JRC runs the Anomaly Hotspots of Agriculture system that provides warnings on agricultural drought affecting crops and rangelands<sup>3</sup>.

Drought is likely the most complex climate-related natural hazards, due to its spatio-temporal evolution, its cascading impacts on all sectors, including agriculture, public water supply, energy production, transportation, tourism, human health, biodiversity, and natural systems. Drought is a climate extreme characterized by an imbalance in the hydrological cycle. It is due to a deficit in precipitation, that accumulates over time, often compounded by warm spells and heatwaves. It is influenced by land and water use and management. Drought can occur on multiple time scales, from a few weeks to several years, affecting large areas and populations worldwide. The related impacts are both direct and indirect and can persist after its end. Depending on the effect in the hydrological cycle and the impacts on society and environment, different drought phases are commonly distinguished:

1. meteorological drought, characterised by a substantial deficit in precipitation. The deficit is defined with respect to the long-term climatology;
2. agricultural drought, characterised by reduced soil moisture that results from below-average precipitation often compounded by above-normal evapotranspiration;
3. hydrological drought, that occurs when river streamflow and water storages in aquifers, lakes, and reservoirs fall below long-term mean levels.

Due to its complexity, drought monitoring relies on a set of different indices and indicators, representing different components of the hydrological cycle (e.g. precipitation, soil moisture, reservoir levels, river flow, and groundwater levels), as well as specific impacts (e.g. vegetation water stress).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://emergency.copernicus.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://drought.emergency.copernicus.eu/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://agricultural-production-hotspots.ec.europa.eu/>

All details of drought indices and indicators used in the Copernicus Drought Observatories are available in the associated factsheets<sup>4</sup> and in the JRC Data Catalogue<sup>5</sup>.

This study is part of a series of analytical reports focused on the analysis of drought events affecting Europe as well as the other regions of the world. These studies build on data and information retrieved and processed by the Copernicus Drought Observatories. The information derived from the Observatories is usually complemented with additional sections on impacts, large-scale circulation, and other relevant factors.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://drought.emergency.copernicus.eu/data/factsheet>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://data.jrc.ec.europa.eu/collection/drought>.

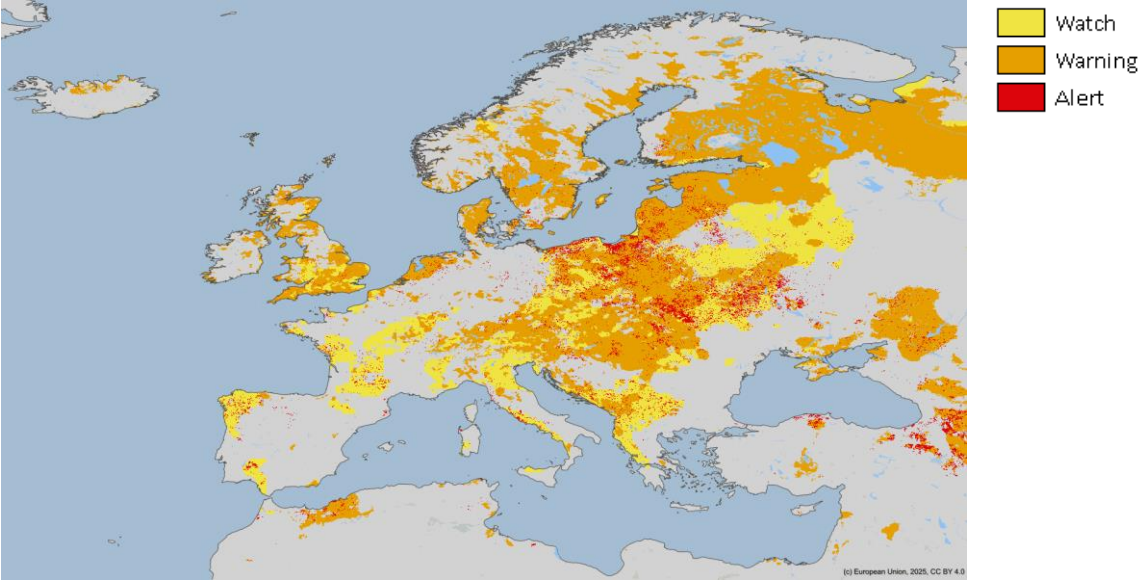
## 2. Combined Drought Indicator (CDI)

The Combined Drought Indicator is used to identify different classes of drought and their extent with a particular focus on vegetated areas (areas at risk of drought, areas where the vegetation has already been affected and areas where the vegetation is recovering from drought). To this purpose, the CDI integrates three complementary scientific indicators: the Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI), the Soil Moisture Index Anomaly (SMA) and the Fraction of Absorbed Photosynthetically Active Radiation (fAPAR) anomaly.

By late April 2026, drought conditions have been gradually deteriorating across eastern, and north-eastern Europe.

According to the Combined Drought Indicator (CDI) for mid-May 2026 (Figure 1), alert conditions emerged and started to expand in Ukraine and Belarus. Warning drought conditions expanded in north-eastern Europe and western Russia and persisted in central-eastern Europe<sup>6</sup>. Watch drought conditions persisted in north-eastern Europe. Additional areas emerged in the Iberian Peninsula, the UK, France, Switzerland, and Italy. Recovery conditions are visible in France, Scandinavia, and Belarus.

**Figure 1.** The Combined Drought Indicator (CDI), based on a combination of indicators of precipitation, soil moisture, and vegetation conditions, for mid-May 2026.



Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory.

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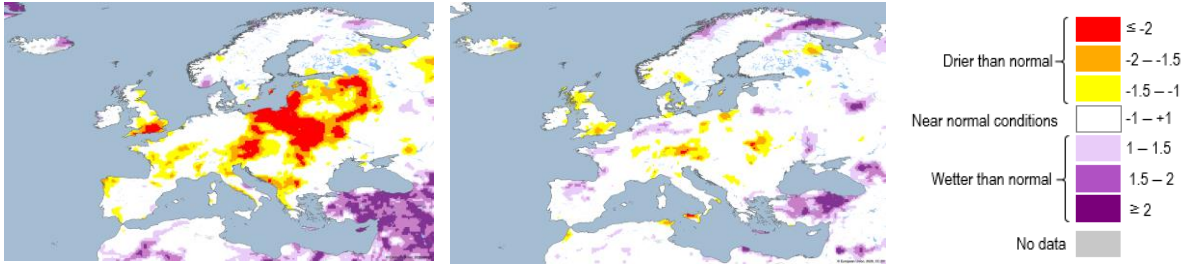
<sup>6</sup> Due to known issues (currently under investigation) that affect the estimated soil moisture, the CDI map may be less reliable in some regions, particularly western Russia. Users may consult the Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) and the Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI), available at the European or Global Drought Observatory (EDO/GDO).

### 3. Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI)

The SPI provides information on the intensity of the precipitation deficit (or surplus) over a defined accumulation period (e.g. from 1 to 48 months). The lower (i.e., more negative) the SPI, the more intense is the drought. SPI can be computed for different accumulation periods. The 3-month period is often used to evaluate agricultural drought and the 12-month (and longer) period for hydrological drought, when rivers fall dry and groundwater tables lower.

Figure 2 displays the SPI for Europe over two different time scales. At the 3-month time scale, SPI shows that the Baltic Sea regions have been affected by a severe and prolonged lack of precipitation hitting in particular Poland and the surrounding countries and the southern part of the UK. In contrast, SPI-1 shows a shorter, more recent, less extensive, and less severe dry period over the eastern Alps, southern Italy, eastern Europe, Poland and the UK. This suggests that the most recent period seems to give at least a temporary and partial relief to the accumulated drought conditions over the last 3 months. The comparison between SPI-3 and SPI-1 highlights the importance of considering multiple time scales when assessing drought conditions.

**Figure 2.** SPI-3 (left panel) and SPI-1 (right panel) at mid-May 2026.

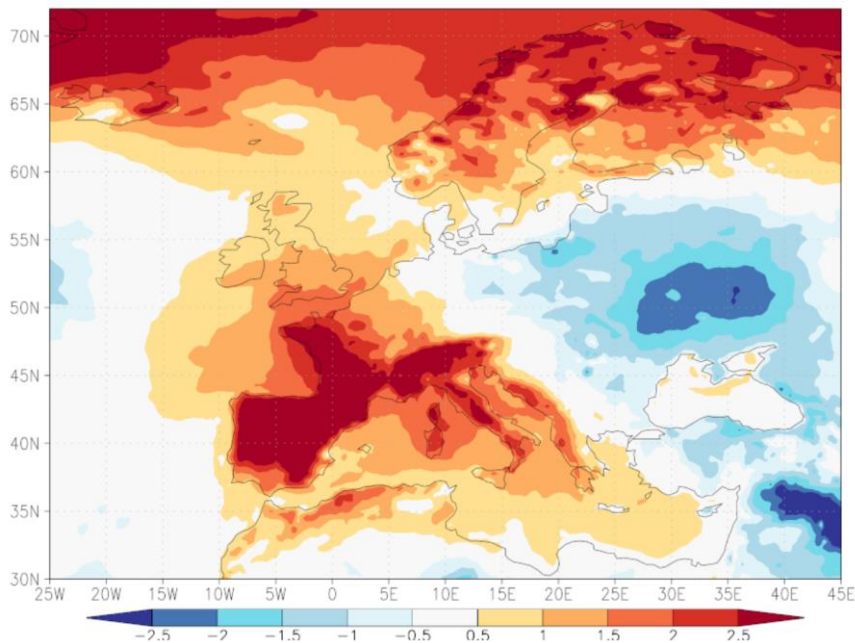


Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on ERA5.

## 4. Temperature

In April 2026, most of western and northern Europe experienced above-average temperatures. The positive temperature anomalies affected mostly the Iberian Peninsula, western France, the Alps, northern Scandinavia, and Italy with anomalies above 2.5 °C.

**Figure 3.** Average temperature anomalies (ERA5 (ECMWF European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts Reanalysis v5), baseline 1991-2020) for April 2026.



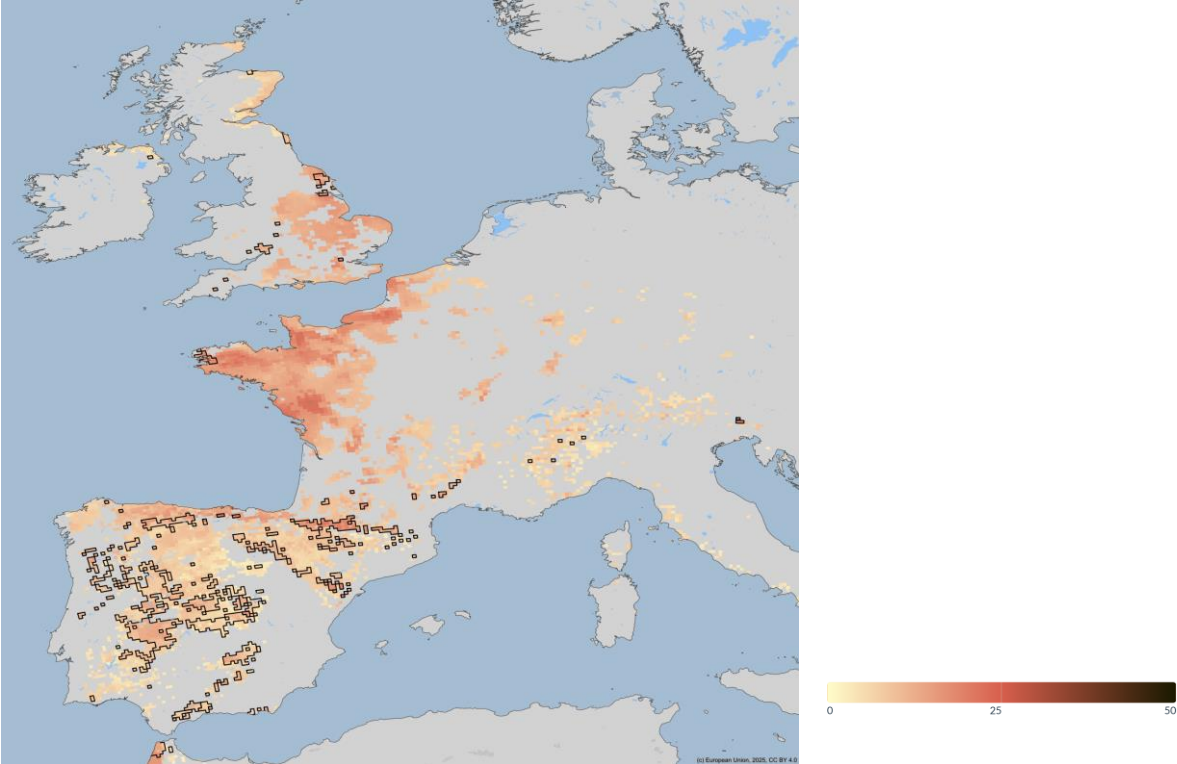
Source: The KNMI (Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut) Climate Explorer<sup>7</sup>.

According to the map of warm spell intensity, following the positive temperature anomalies reported for April, by late May 2026, conditions appear to be continuing in the same direction, with an extensive warm spell hitting mainly the Iberian Peninsula, the UK, western France, and the Alps.

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<sup>7</sup> The KNMI Climate Explorer: <https://climexp.knmi.nl>

**Figure 4.** Accumulated warm spell intensity in degrees Celsius (°C) over the course of the event for 25 May 2026. Grey contours highlight the areas with warm spell duration greater than 4 days.

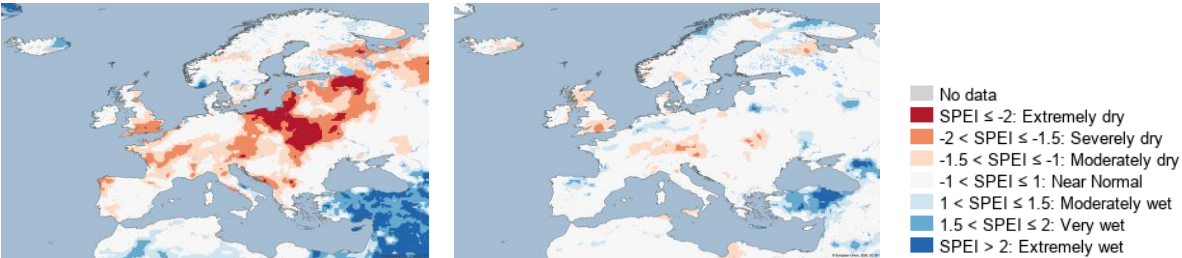


Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on MARSMet.

## 5. Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI)

SPEI accounts for both precipitation and evapotranspiration (potential evapotranspiration, PET, is here computed with the Hargreaves-Samani<sup>8</sup> method) to estimate anomalies of the climatic water balance (precipitation minus potential evapotranspiration) with respect to the climatological average over a given period. Thus, SPEI provides an estimation of the combined effects of precipitation deficit (based on ERA5 data like the formerly discussed SPI) and warmer-than-usual conditions. The SPEI, shown in Figure 5, confirms the prolonged drought and the recent less severe precipitation deficit. SPEI-3 and SPEI-1 well align with the corresponding SPI-3 and SPI-1 confirming that the current drought is mainly precipitation driven and temperatures have played a less relevant role so far, even if negative anomalies in central-western Europe are mainly temperature driven as precipitation are close to average there.

**Figure 5.** SPEI-3 (left panel) and SPEI-1 (right panel) at mid-May 2026.



Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on ERA5.

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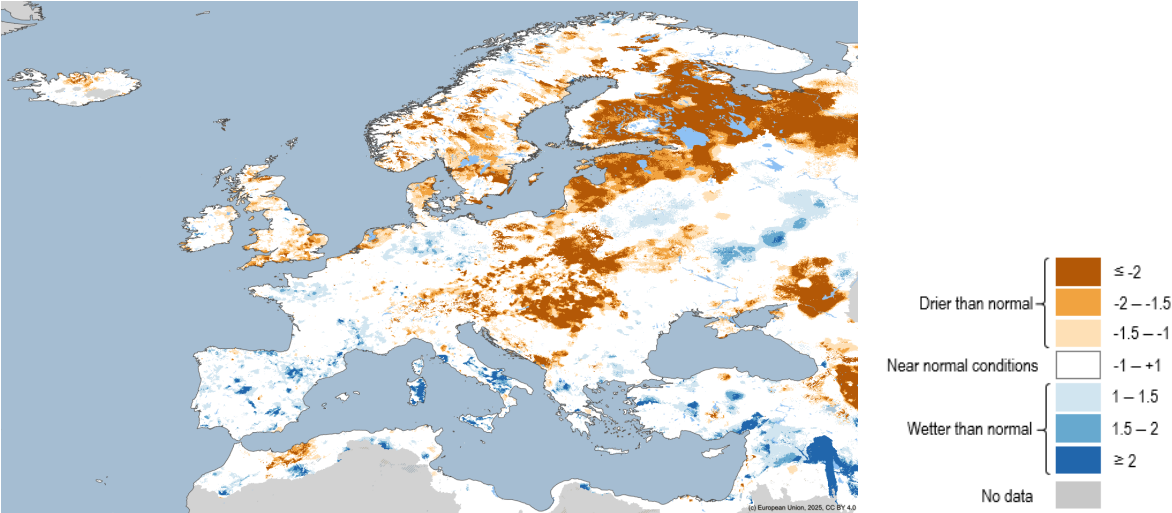
<sup>8</sup> See Hargreaves, G. H. and Samani, Z. A.: Estimating potential evapotranspiration, J. Irrig. Drain E.-ASCE, 108, 223–230, 1982 and Hargreaves, G. H. and Samani, Z. A. 1985. Reference crop evapotranspiration from ambient air temperature, American Society of Agricultural Engineers, 12 pp., available at: <http://libcatalog.cimmyt.org/download/reprints/97977.pdf>.

## 6. Soil moisture

The Soil Moisture Index Anomaly (SMA) is a standardized index that estimates deviations from normal conditions of the root-zone water content. It is an index derived from a hydrological model (OS LISFLOOD) associated with the difficulty of plants in extracting water from the soil.

The Soil Moisture Anomaly shows negative anomalies over most of the Baltic regions, north-eastern Europe, and eastern Europe. Less severe anomalies affect the Alps, northern Italy, the UK, and Southern Scandinavia.

**Figure 6.** Soil Moisture Index Anomaly, mid-May 2026.



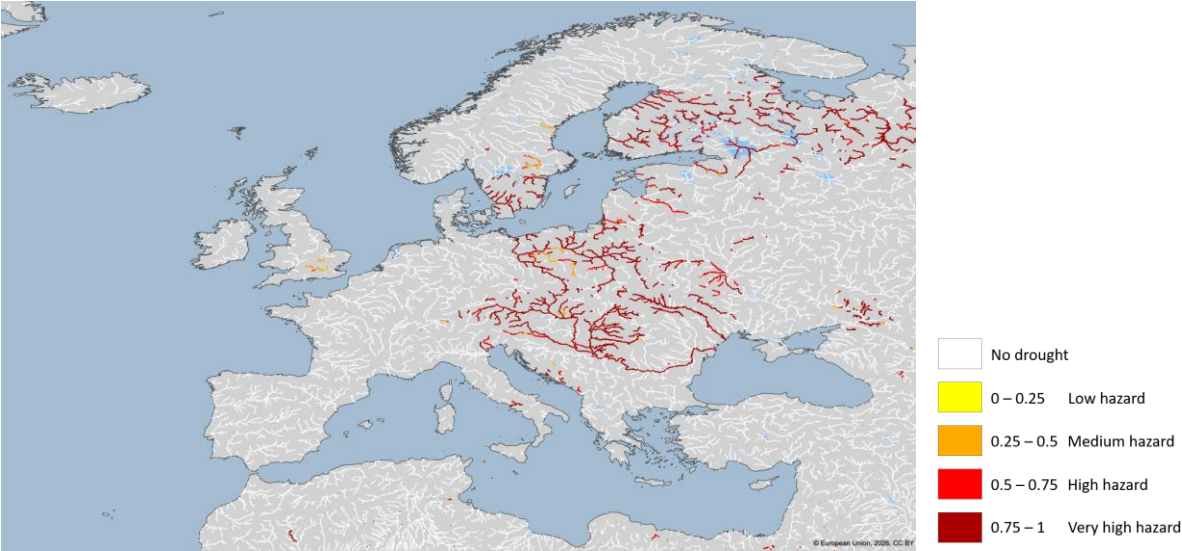
Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on OS LISFLOOD hydrological model.

# 7. Hydrology

The Low-Flow Index (LFI) is a metric used to assess hydrological drought, based on the OS LISFLOOD hydrological model. It identifies consecutive periods of exceptionally low streamflow. By comparing the resulting water deficit during these periods to historical climatological conditions, the LFI enables the estimation of drought severity.

In mid-May 2026, the Low-Flow Index (LFI) shows critical hazard values mainly over eastern Europe, western Russia, and the Baltic Sea regions. Poland is particularly affected. Additionally, some localized critical river branches appear in north-western France. The flow reduction correlates well with the soil moisture anomaly pattern and the lack of precipitation over the last months.

**Figure 7.** Low-Flow Index (LFI) for mid-May 2026.



Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on OS LISFLOOD hydrological model.

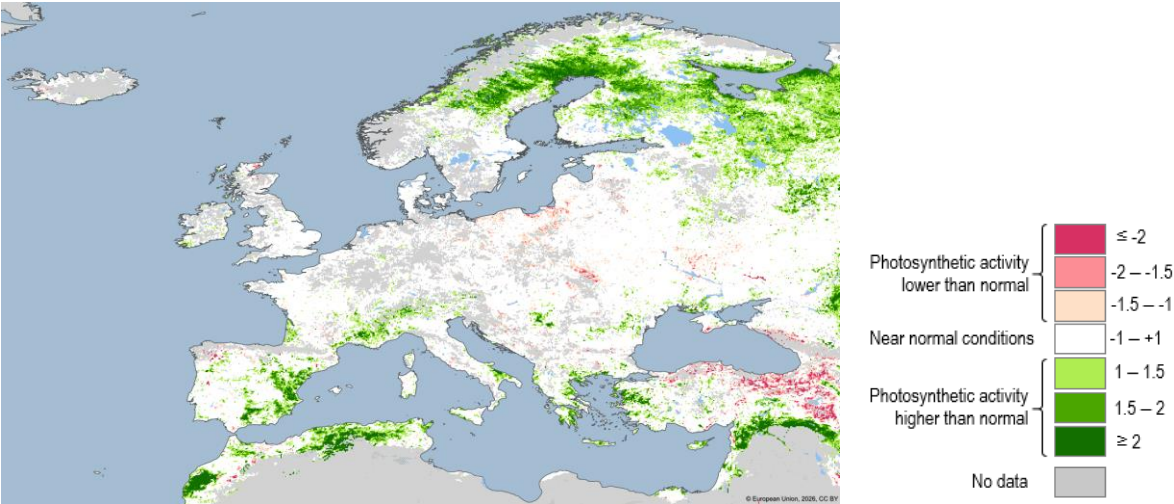
## 8. Vegetation and crops

The satellite-based fraction of Absorbed Photosynthetically Active Radiation (fAPAR) represents the fraction of solar energy absorbed by leaves due to photosynthesis. It is a measure of vegetation health and biomass. Negative fAPAR anomalies with respect to the long-term average are associated with a reduction in biomass and often with negative impacts on vegetation.

In mid-May 2026, the satellite-derived fAPAR anomaly indicator shows emerging vegetation stress mainly over eastern Europe, western Russia, eastern Türkiye, and the north-western Iberian Peninsula, while in the rest of Europe, conditions are close to or better than normal. However, the reduced soil water content in central Europe including southeastern Germany, Austria, Czechia, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary is raising concerns for crops. No irreversible damage is expected for now, but more rain will be needed in the coming weeks to restore soil water to adequate levels.

Dedicated information on the agricultural yield forecast for Europe is provided in the JRC MARS (Monitoring Agricultural Resources) Bulletins<sup>9</sup>.

**Figure 8.** VIIRS (Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite) satellite-derived fAPAR anomalies at mid-May 2026.



Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on VIIRS.

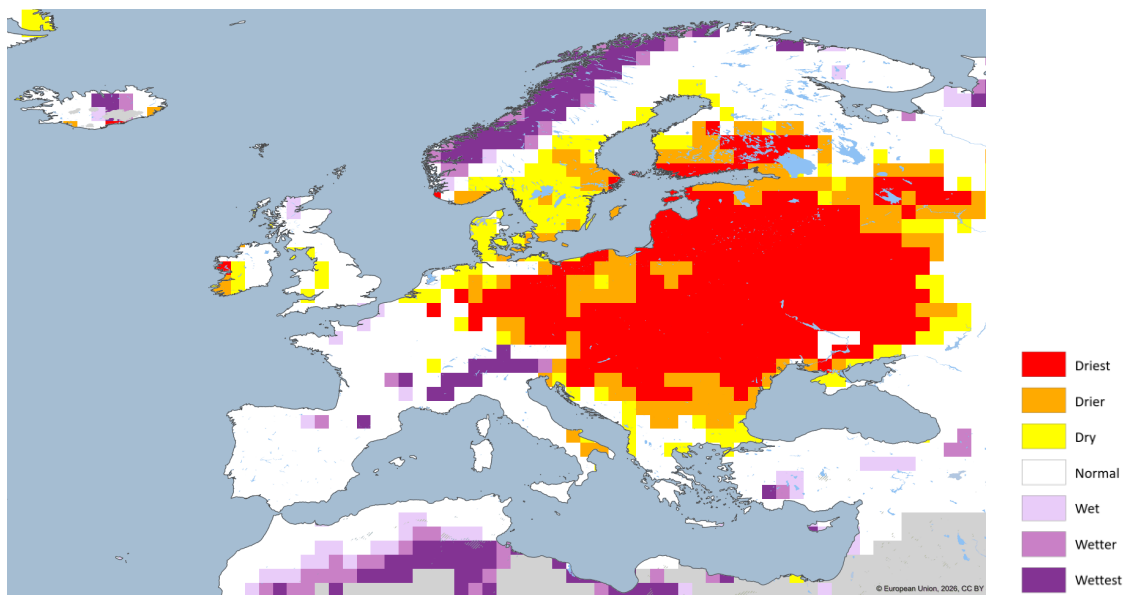
<sup>9</sup> [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/monitoring-agricultural-resources-mars/jrc-mars-bulletin\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/monitoring-agricultural-resources-mars/jrc-mars-bulletin_en)

## 9. Seasonal forecast

The Multi-system Indicator for Forecasting Unusually Wet and Dry Conditions provides early risk information at global scale. The indicator is computed from forecasted SPI-1, SPI-3, and SPI-6 derived from eight components: ECMWF (European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts), CMCC (Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui Cambiamenti Climatici), DWD (Deutscher Wetterdienst), ECCC (Environment and Climate Change Canada), Météo France, NCEP (USA National Centers for Environmental Prediction), UKMO (UK Meteorological Office), BOM (Bureau of Meteorology, Australia).

Severely drier than average conditions are forecasted from May to July 2026 by the multi-system ensemble (Figure 9) over central-eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea regions. This follows an already dry period in the same regions, rising concerns for the drought development and consequent impacts. On the other hand, the northern fringes of Scandinavia as well as parts of the Alps may experience significantly wetter conditions than usual.

**Figure 9.** Multi-system Indicator for Forecasting Unusually Wet and Dry Conditions, May - July 2026, based on dynamic forecasting systems from 8 centres, issued in May 2026: ECMWF, CMCC, DWD, ECCC, Météo France, NCEP, UKMO, BOM. The baseline period is 1993-2016.

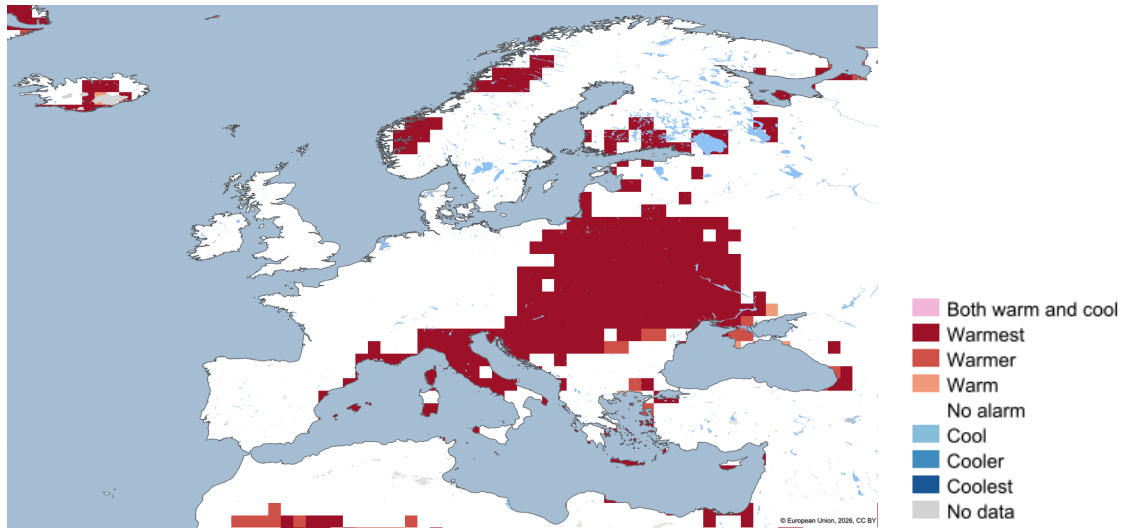


Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on ECMWF, CMCC, DWD, ECCC, Météo France, NCEP, UKMO, BOM.

The individual forecasting systems (not shown here) show broad agreement on the dry anomaly, differing only in spatial extent or severity, with only one out of eight models pointing to a slightly wetter than average forecast.

The Multi-system Indicator for Forecasting Unusual Warm and Cool Conditions provides early risk information at global scale, based on the eight forecasting systems mentioned before. For June 2026, the ensemble predicts warmer than average conditions over the same European regions already affected by precipitation deficit, while close-to-average temperatures are expected elsewhere (Figure 10). This will further exacerbate the current drought.

**Figure 10.** Multi-system Indicator for Forecasting Unusually Warm and Cool Conditions, June 2026, based on dynamic forecasting systems from 8 centres, issued in May 2026: ECMWF, CMCC, DWD, ECCC, Météo France, NCEP, UKMO, BOM. The baseline period is 1993-2016.



Source: JRC, Copernicus EMS European Drought Observatory, based on ECMWF, CMCC, DWD, ECCC, Météo France, NCEP, UKMO, BOM.

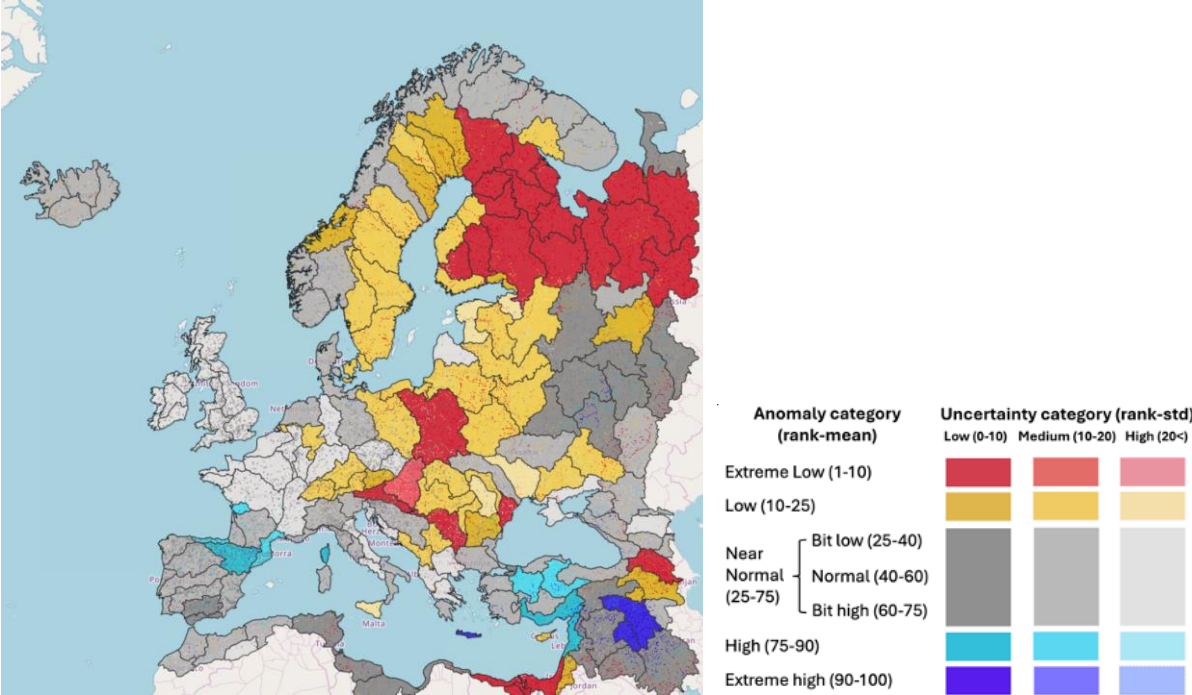
Based on the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) seasonal forecasts<sup>10</sup> (not shown here), warmer than usual conditions are predicted in Europe with a slightly wetter than usual anomaly in southern Europe and a slightly drier anomaly in northern Europe up to August 2026.

June 2026 river flow forecasts from the European Flood Awareness System (EFAS<sup>11</sup>, Figure 11) indicate low to extremely low discharges across most catchments in eastern and north-eastern Europe, pointing to a progressive worsening of drought conditions. Exceptions are the north-western Iberian Peninsula and central Türkiye, where higher than usual flows are predicted.

<sup>10</sup> <https://climate.copernicus.eu/seasonal-forecasts>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://european-flood.emergency.copernicus.eu/react/map>.

**Figure 11.** Seasonal forecast anomaly and uncertainty for June 2026 provided by the 7-month simulation covering June to December 2026, with information aggregated by basin. Different colours indicate the anomaly category, while the colour intensity shows the confidence level in the anomalies, with the lighter colours associated with higher uncertainty. The forecast anomaly and uncertainty signals are derived by comparing the EFAS (European Flood Awareness System) hydrological forecast driven by ECMWF SEAS5 (Seasonal Forecasting System 5) to the 99-value percentile climatology. The climatology is generated using ECMWF SEAS5 reforecasts over a 20-year period<sup>12</sup>.



Source: Copernicus EMS EFAS.

<sup>12</sup> Source: The CEMS European Flood Awareness System (EFAS): <https://www.efas.eu>, documentation at EFAS sub-seasonal and seasonal forecasting - Copernicus Emergency Management Service - CEMS - ECMWF Confluence Wiki. River flow anomalies shown for 204 major basins within the EFAS domain, delineated semi-automatically against the 1 arcmin OS LISFLOOD river network and based on the hydrological model OS LISFLOOD. Colours indicate anomaly direction and color intensity reflects ensemble confidence. Results are based on OS LISFLOOD driven by 51 ECMWF SEAS5 ensemble members (De Roo et al., 2000; <https://ec-jrc.github.io/lisflood/>).

## 10. Reported impacts

According to the JRC MARS Bulletin<sup>13</sup>, crop-growing conditions remain generally favourable across most of Europe, but emerging rainfall deficits locally started to slow down biomass accumulation. This particularly affected central, eastern, and northern Europe, where soil moisture deficits have accumulated since early spring, leading to concerns about water stress. In some regions, such as western France, northern and central Italy, and eastern Germany, the rainfall deficit has not yet significantly affected the fAPAR signal, but crop conditions require monitoring. The drought has also impacted grassland growing conditions, with cool weather and rainfall deficits delaying development in central and eastern regions, and drought stress growing. The yield forecasts for 2026 indicate a mixed picture, with some countries expecting above-average yields, while others are forecasted to have below-average yields. In some European countries, such as Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, the yield forecasts have been revised downwards due to the adverse weather conditions. Overall, the situation requires continuous monitoring to assess the full extent and magnitude of the damage.

The drought conditions in Europe have also been assessed by the Crop Monitor for AMIS (Agricultural Market Information System)<sup>14</sup>, which reports that wheat crop conditions are generally favourable, but additional rainfall is needed in central and eastern Europe to avoid rapid deterioration in crop conditions before entering the reproductive stages. In the EU, winter wheat is under generally favourable conditions, although some areas are experiencing dry conditions. Maize conditions are also favourable, with sowing ongoing under favourable conditions. The Crop Monitor notes that the drought has not yet significantly impacted crop conditions, but there is a potential risk to final production if the dry conditions persist. The report also highlights that soybean sowing is ramping up in the EU under generally favourable conditions, with an expected increase in total sown area compared to last year. Overall, the Crop Monitor suggests that while the drought has not yet had a significant impact on crop conditions in Europe, there is a need for continued monitoring to assess the potential risks to final production.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC145831>

<sup>14</sup> GEOGLAM (Group on Earth Observation Global Agricultural Monitoring) <https://www.cropmonitor.org/crop-monitor-for-amis>

## List of abbreviations and definitions

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
AMIS	Agricultural Market Information System
BOM	Bureau of Meteorology, Australia
C3S	Copernicus Climate Change Service
CDI	Combined Drought Indicator
CEMS	Copernicus Emergency Management Service
CMCC	Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui Cambiamenti Climatici
DWD	Deutscher Wetterdienst
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
ECMWF	European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts
EDO	European Drought Observatory (Copernicus Emergency Management Service, CEMS)
EFAS	European Flood Awareness System
ERA5	ECMWF Reanalysis v5
EU	European Union
fAPAR	Fraction of Absorbed Photosynthetically Active Radiation
GDO	Global Drought Observatory (Copernicus Emergency Management Service, CEMS)
JRC	Joint Research Centre
KNMI	Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut
LFI	Low-Flow Index (LFI)
MARS	Monitoring Agricultural ResourceS

**Abbreviations****Definitions**

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NCEP	National Centers for Environmental Prediction (National oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA)
OS LISFLOOD	grid-based hydrological rainfall-runoff-routing model
PET	Potential Evapotranspiration
SEAS	Seasonal Forecasting System
SMA	Soil Moisture Index Anomaly
SPEI	Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration
SPI	Standardized Precipitation Index
UKMO	United Kingdom Meteorological Office
VIIRS	Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite

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### EU publications

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### EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex ([eur-lex.europa.eu](https://eur-lex.europa.eu)).

### Open data from the EU

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