



# HOW CONVERGING CRISES ARE REDUCING GLOBAL LIFE EXPECTANCY

Global life expectancy has declined for the first time since the 1950s, in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. This worrying trend could be compounded by a global food security crisis and the impact of climate change.

Global life expectancy declined by [1.64 years between 2019 and 2021 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) according to academic research from the University of California.

US life expectancy decreased from [78.85 years in 2019 to 76.44 years in 2021](#), a net loss of 2.41 years. Across a group of [21 advanced countries life expectancy decreased by 0.58 years between 2019 and 2020](#). Spain, Belgium, Italy saw declines in life expectancy of more than a year, driven by increased mortality in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shocks such as wars, pandemics, famines and genocides have impacted life expectancy trends over the past century. Worldwide life expectancy has [been on the rise since 1800](#). World War One and Two reversed this trend in the UK, US and Japan, while the AIDS crisis reversed progress in South Africa during the 1990s.

However, this is the first time that life expectancy has decreased on a global scale since the United Nations started gathering this data in 1950.

## WHAT IS DRIVING THIS SITUATION?

Even before these crises, life expectancy in large parts of the world was way too low driven by preventable diseases, poverty and conflict. But since 2020, the whole world has been facing converging crises of conflict, covid, climate - and their economic aftershocks – which could damage the whole world's future security and undermine hopes of progress and prosperity.

**THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC:** The [WHO estimates that an additional 14.9 million people](#) died in 2020 and 2021. COVID-19 also reversed another trend of progress - extreme poverty, the number of people living on less than \$1.90 a day, which had been declining for three decades, [increased by an estimated 119 to 124 million people in 2020](#). With the COVID-19 pandemic still ongoing and only [14.7% of the population of low income countries fully vaccinated](#), the risk of dangerous variants remains. We must continue to mitigate the worst impacts with vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics over the long term.

**A GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS:** Increases in hunger are driven by poor harvests, climate change and covid related supply chain shocks. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent global food prices skyrocketing. Since the war began an additional [51.1 million people are experiencing hunger](#). [Russia and Ukraine comprise a third of the world's wheat exports](#), a quarter of the world's barley exports and a striking 70% of the world's sunflower oil. The [UN's Food Price Index](#) hit an all time high in March and has remained high since, with the prices of key staples skyrocketing. [30 million people are facing a food emergency](#). This means that households have very high acute malnutrition, and some family members may die. More than half a million people are facing famine, making the likelihood of death from starvation highly likely.

**CLIMATE EMERGENCY:** Climate change isn't an abstract or future threat to vulnerable countries - it's a present danger that's exacerbating the effects of COVID and conflict. Having contributed the least to climate change, low- and middle-income countries - particularly in Africa - now bear the brunt of its impacts. The world's 10 most [climate vulnerable](#) countries are in Africa, accounting for



20% of the continent's population. Millions of livestock have died across the Horn of Africa this year, where over 15 million people [face](#) severe water shortages, food insecurity and historic droughts after a fourth consecutive failed rainy season.

**ECONOMIC DISASTER HITTING VULNERABLE COUNTRIES:** Now, vulnerable countries where the majority of the extreme poor live are facing a perfect storm as their economies have been battered from the economic fallout of COVID-19 which hit remittance flows and tourism revenues. Countries are also facing increased costs of energy and food imports. Costs of [importing vegetable oil are likely to more than double in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Benin](#), while the cost of importing wheat will more than double in Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Algeria, Tunisia and Sudan.

Yet, the support that African countries have received through this crisis is minimal. One significant area of support promised by the G7 and G20 was the allocation of \$100bn Special Drawing Rights - an IMF reserve asset to help countries weather shocks and bolster their economies. But to date only \$60bn has been pledged and none have been delivered.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE TO STEM THIS TIDE?

In this moment of great jeopardy, the ONE Campaign is calling for the G7 to support vulnerable countries in weathering the food security crisis and the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change. A failure to do so risks widespread instability.

### 1. Urgently take steps to tackle the food crisis.

- a. Avoid making the food crisis worse - that means resisting export bans on key commodities, avoiding panic buying, and taking steps to facilitate the export of Ukraine's grain. The UN's emergency appeals should also be fully funded.
- b. Commit to medium term investments to boost production – including gender-responsive approaches to land ownership, financial services and agricultural inputs.
- c. Establish emergency mechanisms that make fertiliser available to vulnerable countries, ensuring equal gender distribution, when prices increase dramatically.

### 2. Support countries with the fiscal space to respond with targeted social protection systems.

- a. Rapidly fulfil the G7 and G20 commitment to recycle US\$100 billion IMF Special Drawing Rights to provide liquidity and help countries respond to COVID-19, the food crisis and climate change.
- b. Provide an effective solution to debt sustainability through fixing the G20's Common Framework.

### 3. Shift from an emergency response to a sustainable response to Covid and future outbreaks

- a. Secure supply of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics to meet demand and need for covid countermeasures over the long term.
- b. Secure additional investments in health system strengthening to detect and respond to future outbreaks.

### 4. G7 countries should make investments to limit the threat from the climate emergency

- a. Fulfill existing pledges on climate finance and ensure that 50% of climate finance is allocated to adaptation.
- b. This investment must be additional to existing development spending. Climate investments must not compete with work to reduce poverty, tackle health threats or address the food security crisis.