Russians' life expectancy last year dropped for the first time in nearly 20 years, according to figures released on Tuesday, with officials blaming the COVID-19 pandemic for the decline.

Life expectancy in Russia plummeted after the fall of the Soviet Union but has been steadily increasing since 2003. In 2020, however, it fell to 71.5 years, compared with 73.3 years in 2019, the ministry's figures indicated.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko earlier this month linked the coronavirus pandemic with both "negative demographic trends" and "a decrease in life expectancy".

Speaking at his annual televised state of the nation address last week, President Vladimir Putin described the demographic situation in the country as "alarming" and said saving the lives of Russians was the Kremlin's "highest national priority".

He said he wanted life expectancy in Russia to reach 78 by 2030.

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