Although contemporary Europe does not suffer from mortality crises, they are not a thing of the past. On the one side, such episodes are still frequent in other parts of the world. On the other, climate change is predicted to cause an increase in extreme weather events, with collateral spikes in mortality. We set out to analyse such crises through the lens of lifespan variation, a little-used though instructive dimension of mortality. By comparing lifespan variation during a mortality crisis with that for the previous and following years, we intend to uncover patterns in lifespan variation which could be tied to mortality crises. We use data from the HMD and a range of measures to capture different dimensions of variation, such as absolute vs relative indicators. Our preliminary results show that, contrary to expectation, absolute variation declines during a crisis, indicating that the increased burden of mortality is shared across the population. However, different patterns in relative inequality highlight that the choice of lifespan variation indicator is a key feature for any study on the subject. We plan to expand these results by including additional cases. We will also compare the change in variation between sexes and decompose it across age groups, so as to better understand its patterns. Besides allowing a deeper comprehension of lifespan variation, these analyses will provide indications for public policies aiming at protecting vulnerable populations during such events.