Short Report:

International comparison of caesarean birth rates, 2020 – 2025

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Introduction

This summary report provides an international comparison of caesarean birth rates, providing a broader context for the recent observed temporal trends in England.

Methods

Caesarean birth (CB) rates were calculated as the percentage of caesarean births relative to total births for each country and year included in the analysis. Data sources and calculation approaches varied by country owing to differences in data availability and reporting formats.

For most European countries (n = 23), CB rates were derived by dividing the annual number of recorded CB procedures by the total number of live births reported to Eurostat (1, 2). An equivalent approach was applied to data for the United States, where annual CB procedure counts and birth totals were obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (3). For England, annual data on mode of birth for each delivery are reported by NHS England in financial years April to March, up to March 2025. A delivery only counts once per pregnancy (i.e there is one delivery if a mother has twins), while a birth applies to each baby. Monthly data from April 2025 to February 2026 (the most recent available online) were used to estimate the proportion of caesarean births in the most recent 11 months. (4).

Where primary administrative data were unavailable, alternative sources were used. For Suriname, Brazil, Mexico, and Ghana, CB rates were extracted from peer-reviewed published literature (5-8). For Lebanon the 2019 CB rate was obtained from a publication by the Ministry of Public Health (9). For the Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—CB rates were sourced from the Statistical Information on Welfare and Health database (10, 11), which provides data for elective and emergency procedures. For Italy, Slovenia, Latvia (2024 data only), France (2020 and 2024 data), Netherlands, Canada, Lebanon (2025 data only), and Sri Lanka, CB rate estimates were provided by local collaborators in the INOSS network (*https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/inoss*).

Findings:

Caesarean births accounted for 32.9% of all deliveries in England in 2020, placing the country 14th in the ranking of the 42 countries for which we have data. In 2025, the caesarean rate had risen to 44.5%, and England ranked 9 out of 42 countries. As shown in Figure 1, there has been a marked increase in the caesarean birth rate in the last 5 to 7 years, which is not reflected in the observed trends in other Western European countries or the USA.

Across the time period, just over half of caesarean births were emergency caesarean births. Table 2, and Figure 2, both based on NHS published data, demonstrate that the increase in caesarean births is a result of increases in both planned (elective) caesarean and emergency operative births. Planned caesareans accounted for 14.4% in 2020, rising to 20.4% in 2025, while emergency caesarean births rose from 18.5% of all births to 24.1%. However, these figures are for actual mode of birth, and so it does not show how many of the women who had an emergency caesarean were already planning a caesarean birth but required intervention before the elective surgery date.

Interpretation:

England has experienced a marked increase in caesarean births, particularly since 2019. This trend is not reflected in other European countries or the USA. These recent trends should be considered in the context of other demographic, health, social and health system changes in England. This short report is the initial output of ongoing research in the NPEU to understand the drivers of recent trends in caesarean births, drawing on wider evidence on the changing health of the nation and the wider context of maternity care in England.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the INOSS collaborators who provided up to date country specific data.

Table 1: Rates of overall caesarean birth, by country, from 2020 to the most recent year, ordered by prevalence in 2020

	Year (~2020)	2020 Caesarean birth rates	2020 rank	Year (most recent)	Most recent Caesarean birth rates	New rank	Sources
Türkiye	2020	57.3%	1	2023	61.5%	2	(1, 2)
Brazil	2020	57.2%	2	2021	57.0%	3	(5)
Cyprus	2020	56.5%	3	2023	62.1%	1	(1, 2)
Lebanon	2019	49.4%	4	2025	55.0%	4	(9, 12)
Mexico	2020	48.0%	5	2024	55.0%	5	(6)
Bulgaria	2020	45.6%	6	2023	45.7%	8	(1, 2)
Romania	2020	42.3%	7	2023	51.4%	6	(1, 2)
Sri Lanka	2020	40.5%	8	2024	46.0%	7	(13)
Poland	2020	39.2%	9	2023	43.1%	10	(1, 2)
Hungary	2020	38.3%	10	2023	36.7%	13	(1, 2)
Portugal	2020	35.9%	11	2023	37.9%	12	(1, 2)
Ireland	2020	34.7%	12	2023	38.6%	11	(1, 2)
North Macedonia	2020	34.4%	13	2021	34.4%	15	(1, 2)
England	**2020**	**32.9%**	**14**	**2025***	**44.5%**	**9**	(4)
Serbia	2020	32.4%	15	2023	32.9%	18	(1, 2)
Switzerland	2020	31.9%	16	2023	33.3%	17	(1, 2)
USA	2020	31.8%	17	2023	32.3%	21	(3)
Italy	2020	31.3%	18	2024	29.8%	25	(14)
Malta	2020	31.0%	19	2023	34.7%	14	(1, 2)
Canada	2020/2021	31.0%	20	2024/2025	34.0%	16	(15)
Germany	2020	29.9%	21	2023	32.6%	20	(16)
Austria	2020	29.7%	22	2023	31.9%	22	(1, 2)
Slovakia	2020	29.4%	23	2023	31.3%	23	(1, 2)
Ghana	2020	28.3%	24	2023	32.6%	19	(7)
Luxembourg	2020	28.2%	25	2023	29.5%	26	(1, 2)
Croatia	2020	27.8%	26	2023	28.9%	27	(1, 2)
Spain	2020	24.2%	27	2023	24.7%	29	(1, 2)
Suriname	2020	23.9%	28	2021	23.9%	31	(8)
Czechia	2020	23.8%	29	2023	25.4%	28	(1, 2)
Moldova	2020	23.3%	30	2023	29.8%	24	(1, 2)
Latvia	2020	21.9%	31	2024	24.0%	30	(1, 2, 7)
Belgium	2020	21.4%	32	2023	22.4%	33	(1, 2)
Slovenia	2020	21.2%	33	2024	21.5%	35	(18)
France	2020	20.4%	34	2024	22.0%	34	(19)
Lithuania	2020	20.0%	35	2023	22.5%	32	(1, 2)
Estonia	2020	19.6%	36	2023	20.7%	36	(1, 2)
Denmark	2020	19.6%	37	2024	20.3%	37	(10, 11)
Finland	2020	18.4%	38	2024	20.3%	38	(10, 11)
Sweden	2020	17.9%	39	2024	20.0%	39	(10, 11)
Netherlands	2020	17.6%	40	2023	18.4%	40	(20)
Iceland	2020	16.1%	41	2024	14.0%	42	(10, 11)
Norway	2020	15.8%	42	2024	16.3%	41	(10, 11)

** April 2025 to February 2026*

Figure 1: Trends in Caesarean births in England, western Europe and the USA, 2004-2025

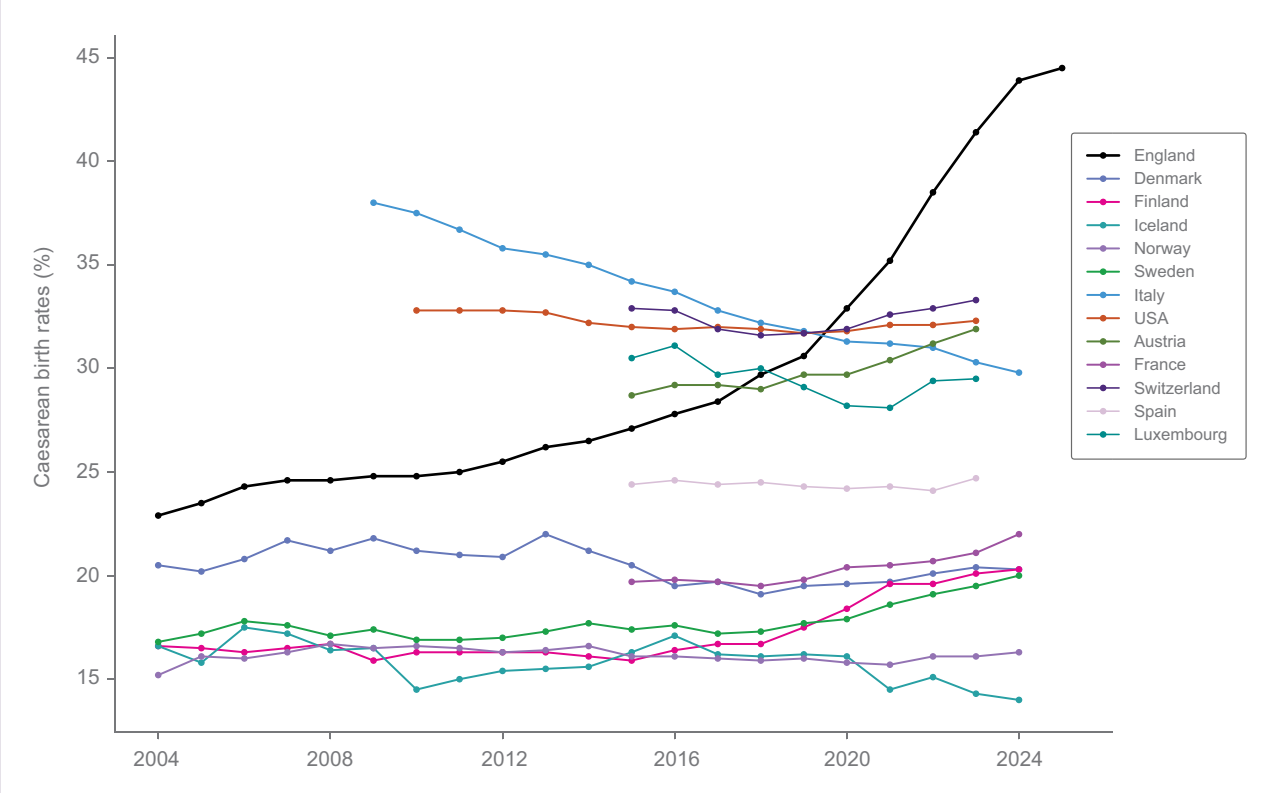


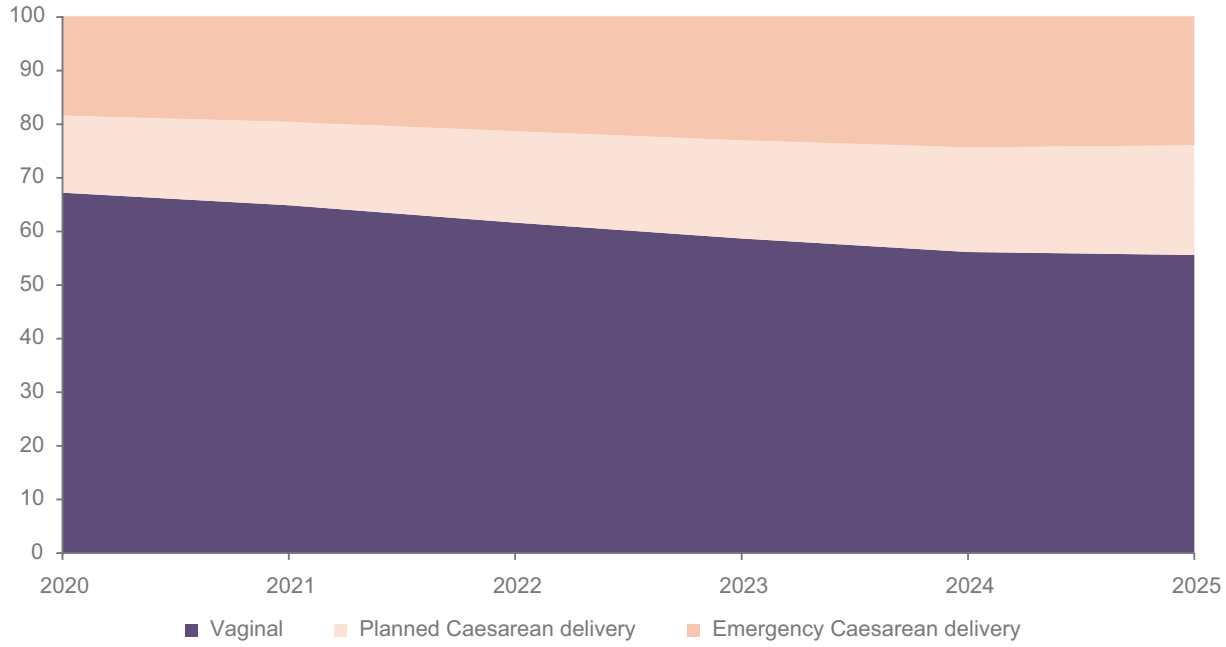
Table 2: Actual mode of birth as a proportion of all deliveries in England, 2020 to 2025

	Year					
Mode of birth	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
Vaginal	67.1	64.8	61.5	58.6	56.1	55.5
Caesarean	32.9	35.2	38.5	41.4	43.9	44.5
Planned	*14.4*	*15.5*	*17.0*	*18.3*	*19.5*	*20.4*
Emergency	*18.5*	*19.7*	*21.4*	*23.1*	*24.4*	*24.1*

Reference [4].

Note: Years run April to March, except 2025 which runs April to Feb 2026 (11 months). Vaginal includes instrumental deliveries.

Figure 2: The changing contribution of planned and emergency caesarean deliveries in England, 2020 - 2025



Note: Years run April to March, except 2025 which runs April to Feb 2026 (11 months). Vaginal includes instrumental deliveries.

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