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Nearly one in three live births caesarean in 2022

Cesarean section rate increased from 12.4% in 1995 to 31.7%

Vienna, 2023-07-20 – According to Statistics Austria, 31.7% of the 81 892 live births in Austria in 2022 were delivered by caesarean section. 5 647 babies or 6.9% were born prematurely, i.e. before the 37th week of pregnancy. A new-born girl weighed an average of 3 262 grams and was 50.4 cm long. Boys were slightly heavier at 3 389 grams and also taller at 51.0 cm.

“In 2022, almost one in three new-borns was born by caesarean section. Thus, the number of caesarean births has more than doubled within the last 25 years. In an EU comparison, Austria is in the upper midfield. The proportion of caesarean deliveries is comparatively low in the northern European countries, while in Cyprus more than half of the children are born by caesarean section,” says Tobias Thomas, Director General of Statistics Austria.

Majority of babies delivered spontaneously

61% of live births were delivered naturally in 2022. Almost one in three births was by caesarean section (31.7%), 0.8 percentage points more than in the previous year (2021: 30.9%). Thus, the trend of an increasing caesarean rate continues and has increased 2.6-fold since 1995 (12.4%). Other methods of obstetric delivery were used less frequently: a ventouse delivery was used in 7.3% of deliveries in 2022, and forceps were only necessary in a total of 37 births (0.05%).

Caesarean section rates were below 30% in only three provinces in 2022: in Upper Austria with 28.1% and in Vorarlberg and Salzburg with 28.4% each. In Lower Austria, it was slightly lower than the Austrian average at 31.2%. The caesarean section rate was above average in Vienna (32.3%), Tyrol (33.9%), Carinthia (34.1%), Burgenland (35.1%) and Styria (35.8%).

A key indicator for caesarean delivery is the position of the child in the womb. Caesarean section was performed in about half of the cases (52.6%) in which the baby was born in an abnormal vertex presentation, and in the vast majority of cases (95.4% and 98.5%) in which the baby was born in a breech presentation or transverse presentation. A caesarean section was also performed in most cases of multiple births (80.3%).

1.5% of babies are born at home

The majority of babies (98.1%) are born in a hospital; in 231 live births (0.3%), the mother chose to give birth in a maternity home or midwifery practice. In only 2.7% of these cases did the mother stay in the hospital or maternity home/midwifery practice for less than 24 hours (“outpatient birth”). 1 192 babies (1.5%) were home births, meaning they were born at the mother’s place of residence. 34 babies were born on the way to the hospital.

Later motherhood causes more caesarean sections

Late motherhood increases the likelihood of caesarean delivery. Women 35 years or older at delivery were 1.6 times more likely to have a caesarean section than women younger than 25 years (caesarean section rate 38.8% vs. 24.5%).

The average age of the mother at the time of delivery was 31.5 years in 2022, up 4.2 years from 30 years ago (27.3 years in 1992). In the same period, the average age of women who became mothers for the first time increased from 25.3 years to the current 30.3 years.

The proportion of mothers who were under 25 when their child was born has fallen sharply in recent decades (1992: 34.1%; 2022: 10.4%), while the proportion of women who became mothers at 35 or later has more than tripled (1992: 7.5%; 2022: 24.6%).

Around 5% of singleton births and 57% of multiple births were preterm

92.8% of live births occurred on schedule, i.e. between the 37th and 42nd week of gestation. 6.9% were born prematurely, and 0.3% were carried over. Thus, the preterm birth rate decreased slightly (–0.2 percentage points) compared to the previous year. The highest rate of premature births to date was 8.9% in 2008.

6.0% of babies born in 2022 had a birth weight of less than 2 500 grams (“underweight”). A high birth weight of 4 500 grams or more was recorded for 1.2% of new-born boys and 0.5% of girls.

Prematurity and low birth weight are much more common in multiple births. 56.8% of the 2 314 babies born as twins or triplets were born before 37 weeks of gestation; 57.0% had a birth weight below 2 500 grams. For singleton births, these proportions were 5.5% and 4.5%, respectively.

Under the mortality ratios 2020/2022 (smoothed average), a boy born on 1 January 2022 will live to 78.93 years, and a girl born on the same day to 83.75 years. These and other individual calculations can be performed by the user with the help of Statistics Austria's updated [life expectancy calculator](#).

For detailed results and further information please refer to our [website](#).

Table 1a: Live births 2022 by selected medical characteristics

Characteristics	absolute	in percent
Total live births ¹ (absolute)	81 892	100.0
Place of delivery		
Hospital	80 348	98.1
Maternity home/midwifery practice	231	0.3
Mother's home	1 192	1.5
At transport	34	0.0
Another place	87	0.1
Age of mother at birth		
Under 20 years	839	1.0
20 to 24 years	7 713	9.4
25 to 29 years	23 583	28.8
30 to 34 years	29 699	36.3
35 to 39 years	16 126	19.7
40 to 44 years	3 657	4.5
45 years and older	275	0.3
Average age at childbirth (in years)	31.5	-
Average age at first birth (in years)	30.3	-
Mode of delivery		
Spontaneous delivery	49 942	61.0
Total caesarean section	25 950	31.7
Primary (before birth, planned)	13 268	16.2
Secondary (during birth, not planned)	12 682	15.5
Ventouse delivery	5 954	7.3
Forceps delivery	37	0.0
Manual delivery	9	0.0

S: STATISTICS AUSTRIA, Vital statistics.

1) Live births with domestic place of birth and residence of the mother in Austria.

Table 1b: Live births 2022 by selected medical characteristics

Characteristics	absolute	in percent
Position of the baby at birth		
Normal vertex	73 163	89.3
Abnormal vertex	4 373	5.3
Breech	3 809	4.7
Transverse lie	411	0.5
Unknown/not determinable	136	0.2
Duration of pregnancy¹		
Under 22+0	36	0.0
Preterm birth (22+0 to 36+6) ²	5 647	6.9
Term birth (37+0 to 41+6)	76 004	92.8
Transferred births (42+0 and more)	205	0.3
Average length of pregnancy (in weeks)	39.3	-
Birth weight in gram		
Underweight (under 2 500 g)	4 902	6.0
Normal weight (2 500 to under 4 500 g)	76 297	93.2
Overweight (4 500 g and more)	693	0.8
Average birth weight – total	3 328	-
Boys	3 389	-
Girls	3 262	-
Body length in cm		
Average body length – total	50.7	-
Boys	51.0	-
Girls	50.4	-

S: STATISTICS AUSTRIA, Vital statistics.

1) Duration of pregnancy: data in completed weeks and days. – 2) For the calculation of the preterm birth rate, only live births from pregnancy week 22+0 are considered.

Table 2: Live births in 2022 by federal province and selected medical characteristics

Characteristics	Burgen- land	Carinthia	Lower Austria	Upper Austria	Salzburg	Styria	Tyrol	Vorarl- berg	Vienna
Total live births ¹ (absolute)	2 129	4 432	14 414	14 647	5 394	10 628	7 341	3 946	18 961
Hospital births in %	98.4	96.8	97.4	98.2	98.9	98.4	98.5	98.0	98.4
Caesarean section rate in %	35.1	34.1	31.2	28.1	28.4	35.8	33.9	28.4	32.3
Underweight births in %	8.3	6.8	6.8	6.3	5.8	7.4	7.7	6.4	7.1
Average birth weight (in grams)	6.4	6.5	5.5	5.7	5.3	6.1	6.8	6.0	6.3
Average body length (in centi- metres)	3 316	3 295	3 354	3 357	3 327	3 303	3 274	3 334	3 326
Preterm birth rate ² in %	50.4	50.9	50.7	50.9	51.0	50.7	50.3	51.1	50.6

S: STATISTICS AUSTRIA, Vital statistics.

1) Live births with domestic place of birth and residence of the mother in Austria. – 2) For the calculation of the preterm birth rate, only live births from pregnancy week 22+0 are considered.

Information on methodology, definitions: The legal basis for birth statistics is the Civil Status Act (BGBl. No. 16/2013 as amended) and the Midwives Act (BGBl. No. 310/1994 as amended), which define the characteristics to be reported by midwives at births. Most recently, with the establishment of a central civil status register (ZPR) as of 1 November 2014, a revision of the medical and socio-medical survey characteristics on the birth certificate took place.

Live birth: Regardless of the duration of pregnancy, a foetus is considered to be born alive if, after complete emergence from the mother's womb, either breathing begins or some other sign of life can be detected, such as heartbeat, pulsation of the umbilical cord or clear movement of voluntary muscles, regardless of whether the umbilical cord has been cut or not or whether the placenta has been expelled or not (definition according to the WHO guidelines).

Place of delivery: An institutional birth is a birth in a hospital. A birth can also take place in a maternity home or a midwifery practice. A home birth is a birth at the mother's place of residence. If the baby is born on the way to hospital, it is coded "At transport".

Age at birth: Age of the mother in completed years at the time of birth. The average age of the mother is the arithmetic mean of the age of the women at the time of birth.

Length of pregnancy: in completed weeks plus days (the next week or part thereof). A gestation period of 22+0 to 36+6 is called preterm, 37+0 to 41+6 is called term birth, 42+0 and over is called transferred birth (definition according to WHO guidelines).

Birth position: The position of the child at birth refers to the relationship of the longitudinal axis of the child to the longitudinal axis of the mother or the uterus. A distinction is made between normal vertex position, abnormal vertex position, breech position, transverse position and unknown/not determinable.

Birth weight: Live births with a birth weight of 2 500 g to less than 4 500 g are considered normal-weight; those with less than 2 500 g are considered underweight; values of 4 500 g or more are considered very high birth weight (definition according to WHO guidelines).

If you have any questions on this topic, please contact:

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