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Survey Finds 60% of European Spirits Producers See a Worse Business Climate

Many still expect to hold or increase investment over the next year, with regulation emerging as the main challenge.

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A survey of European spirits producers shows a clear drop in business confidence, even as many companies say they still plan to keep investing over the next year.

According to the survey, released by spiritsEUROPE on Sept. 10, 60% of 50 producers said the business environment had worsened over the past 12 months. The same share said they were not confident that European production would grow during the next year. The findings point to a sector that sees weaker operating conditions across the European Union but has not yet broadly pulled back on capital spending.

The survey was carried out in the summer of 2026 among 50 companies, most of them small and medium-sized businesses. spiritsEUROPE said the questions focused on confidence, investment plans and trade barriers in the EU market.

Despite the weak outlook, the responses on investment were more stable than the confidence figures. Almost one in three producers said they expect to increase investment over the next 12 months. Most of the rest said they planned to keep investment unchanged rather than cut it. That split suggests many companies still see a reason to spend on operations, capacity or market position, even while they report a tougher commercial climate.

The survey also points to regulation as a central concern. More than half of respondents identified regulation as their main immediate challenge. The publication did not break down all of the specific rules involved, but the result indicates that compliance demands and policy changes remain a major pressure point for distillers and other spirits makers across the bloc.

Trade practices were another major source of concern. spiritsEUROPE said 86% of respondents reported facing persistent unfair trading practices. In addition, 40% said those practices had become worse over the past five years. The findings suggest that many producers believe competitive pressures are not limited to weaker demand or higher costs, but also include the way products are bought, sold and placed in the market.

The survey did not attach dollar or euro values to planned investment, and it did not provide a detailed breakdown by country or company size beyond saying that the respondents were mainly SMEs. It also did not provide a selection method, a margin of error or a directly comparable earlier survey wave that would allow a firm historical reading of the change in sentiment. That limits how far the findings can be used as a

statistical measure of the whole European spirits industry.

Even so, the results are notable because they show a gap between outlook and action. A majority of respondents said business conditions had deteriorated and doubted that production would expand in the coming year. At the same time, only a minority signaled a pullback in investment. For industry groups and policymakers, that may indicate that producers are trying to stay competitive and preserve long-term plans even while near-term confidence is weak.

The publication comes from an industry association, not a public statistical agency, and it was described as a new secondary release of an earlier survey rather than a fresh update published on Sept. 22. That distinction matters because the figures do not represent a new measurement taken after Sept. 10. They instead highlight responses gathered earlier in the summer and republished to underline current industry concerns.

The spirits sector in Europe includes a large number of export-oriented producers, as well as family-owned and regional businesses that depend on domestic distribution networks. For smaller companies in particular, heavier regulation and disputes over trading practices can affect margins, planning and access to shelves. The survey’s results suggest those issues are weighing on sentiment across different parts of the market.

spiritsEUROPE framed the survey around confidence, investment and barriers to doing business. On confidence, the message was mostly negative. On investment, the picture was more mixed. On barriers, respondents pointed first to regulation and then to unfair practices in trade. Taken together, the answers describe an industry that sees a more difficult operating environment but has not yet moved into a broad defensive retreat.

Because the survey covered only 50 companies and did not publish detailed methodology, its figures should be read as a signal from participating producers rather than a definitive reading of the entire EU market. Still, the responses offer a useful snapshot of how companies in the sector view the months ahead. They show that concern about business conditions is widespread, that doubts about production growth are strong, and that many producers continue to spend in spite of that uncertainty.