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# Germany Moves to Tax Ready-to-Drink Alcohol Mixes Up to 15% ABV

A Bundestag committee backed the measure after a legal analysis warned of higher prices, product changes and fresh labeling duties

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Germany is moving toward a broader tax on ready-to-drink alcoholic mixes after the Bundestag's finance committee backed a package on November 12 that would delay the planned sugar tax, spare sparkling wine from a higher alcohol tax and extend the alcopop tax to mixed drinks with up to 15% alcohol by volume. A legal analysis published Monday, November 16 said the change, if enacted, could push up prices, reshape product ranges and create new labeling duties for some beverages already on store shelves.

The analysis was written by Christian Böhler, a Frankfurt-based lawyer at Squire Patton Boggs who works on food, beverage and consumer goods law. He said the planned alcopop expansion would come with a lower tax rate than first proposed, but it could still draw many more products into the tax net than under the current system.

Under the committee's plan, the introduction of a tax on sugary drinks would be pushed back by six months to early 2028 and then phased in over three years. At the same time, sparkling wine would be exempted from the planned increase in alcohol tax. In exchange, the alcopop tax would be widened to cover mixed drinks up to 15% ABV.

That matters because the German alcopop tax was originally designed to target a narrower group of sweet, spirit-based drinks that became popular before 2004. Those products, often sold as flavored ready-to-drink mixes with about 5% to 6% ABV, were seen by lawmakers as especially appealing to young people because of their sweet taste, branding and lower perceived strength. The policy aim was to make those drinks more expensive and reduce demand among minors and young consumers.

According to Böhler's analysis, that policy had a clear market effect after 2004. Many products at 10% ABV or below largely disappeared or were reformulated with higher alcohol content to avoid the alcopop tax. Others remained on the market by changing the alcohol base from distilled spirits to alcohol derived from wine, which also allowed producers to avoid the tax in some cases.

If the tax base is now expanded to cover mixed drinks up to 15% ABV, a much wider range of products could be affected. Böhler said that, together with the separate planned increase in alcohol tax, the result could be a significant added burden for companies and, ultimately, higher prices for consumers. For the beverage industry, the effect could go beyond pricing. Manufacturers and importers of ready-to-drink products could face changes in product design, retailers could have to manage older inventory differently, and compliance teams could need to review labeling and youth-protection rules across entire portfolios.

The analysis also pointed to a more complicated commercial effect. Because the proposed alcopop rate would be lower than first planned, its interaction with a broader alcohol tax increase could make some lower-strength mixed drinks more viable again. Böhler said companies are likely to examine whether that combination opens space for a return of products that disappeared from the German market after 2004.

Wine producers appear to be in a better position under the current plan. With the proposed sparkling wine tax increase dropped and the wine tax otherwise unchanged, the wine industry would largely avoid the direct impact of the alcopop changes, according to the analysis. But the broader ready-to-drink segment would face more uncertainty, especially where products sit close to the new 15% threshold or use mixed alcohol bases.

One of the main regulatory issues involves labeling and youth protection. Böhler said that if drinks up to 15% ABV are brought under the alcopop tax, those products could also fall under a rule requiring the warning, “Sale to persons under 18 prohibited, Section 9 Youth Protection Act.” That could create immediate issues for existing stock already in supermarkets and other food retail channels if labels do not match the new requirements.

He also said legal uncertainty remains over how broadly authorities would interpret the term “mixture of beverages” under the alcopop tax law. In his analysis, Böhler raised questions about whether products such as cream liqueurs diluted to under 15% ABV or fruit-based drinks like strawberry liqueur mixes would actually fall within the tax. He said those cases would need to be assessed individually, suggesting that some producers may not know with confidence whether their products are covered until regulators or courts provide clearer guidance.

The committee’s November 12 decision does not by itself settle those questions, but it gives beverage companies an early signal that tax, assortment and packaging decisions may need to be reviewed well before any new rules take effect. In the ready-to-drink market in particular, the proposed change could influence not only what products remain on sale in Germany, but also how they are formulated, labeled and priced.