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Germany Lets Christmas Markets Sell Non-Alcoholic Glühwein Under That Name

An updated European Union rule for the 2026 season ends a labeling ban tied to Glühwein’s former 7% minimum alcohol definition

Friday, November 20, 2026



Christmas market vendors in Germany can now sell dealcoholized Glühwein under the name that most directly describes it: non-alcoholic Glühwein, or non-alcoholic mulled wine. The change, now in effect for the 2026 holiday season, follows an update in

European Union rules that had previously blocked the use of that label because Glühwein was legally defined as a product with a minimum alcohol content of 7%.

SWR Aktuell reported on Friday that the new naming rule is already being used at Christmas markets in Baden-Württemberg, where the seasonal drink is a staple. The rule also applies in retail stores, although industry representatives said it may take longer to appear broadly on shelves because many products for the current season had already been prepared and distributed under older names.

Hermann Morast, managing director of the Württemberg winegrowers' association, told SWR that the retail transition would likely be slow for that reason. At market stalls, however, vendors are expected to use the new label immediately. Until now, producers and sellers often relied on alternative names such as Glühpunsch or other marketing terms when the drink was made from dealcoholized wine rather than standard wine.

Wine industry groups said the change should make labeling clearer for consumers. Morast told SWR that wineries had been put in the awkward position of having to explain why they were selling a "punch" even when the product was effectively a non-alcoholic version of mulled wine. He said clearer naming could help customers understand what they are buying, especially at Christmas markets where price and value are under closer scrutiny.

The Badische winegrowers' association expressed a similar view but said it does not expect a sharp jump in demand. Its managing director, Holger Klein, told SWR that the new label could make marketing easier and give demand some support because the term non-alcoholic Glühwein is immediately understandable to consumers. He also said the wording more clearly separates products based on dealcoholized wine from non-alcoholic punches made from fruit juice.

That distinction could matter beyond Christmas markets. For wineries, distributors and retailers, the rule gives a clearer legal identity to a seasonal drink category that had been marketed under substitute names. It may also help beverage sellers present dealcoholized wine-based products differently from hot juice punches, which could affect product placement, consumer expectations and branding during a key winter sales period.

Industry groups said the broader market for non-alcoholic wine has been growing in Germany, even if it remains small. Klein pointed to NielsenIQ data compiled for the German Wine Institute showing that the volume of non-alcoholic wine bought in Germany rose 86% in 2024 from 2023. Even so, those products still accounted for only a low single-digit share of the overall wine market. Klein said it was unclear how far that trend could be applied to non-alcoholic Glühwein, which is a more seasonal product.

Consumer advocates also welcomed the clearer label but warned that shoppers should not confuse non-alcoholic with alcohol-free in the strictest sense. Sabine Holzäpfel, a food and nutrition specialist at the Baden-Württemberg Consumer Center, told SWR that non-alcoholic Glühwein can still contain less than 0.5% alcohol by volume. She said that means it is not suitable for children, pregnant women or people who completely avoid alcohol. For those groups, she said, hot drinks based on tea or fruit juice are the better choice.

The rule change gives German producers a simpler way to describe a drink that had already reached the market in practice but not in name. Whether that leads to significantly higher sales remains uncertain, but wineries and market operators now have a label that better matches the contents of the cup.