

Why young Germans are turning their back on alcohol

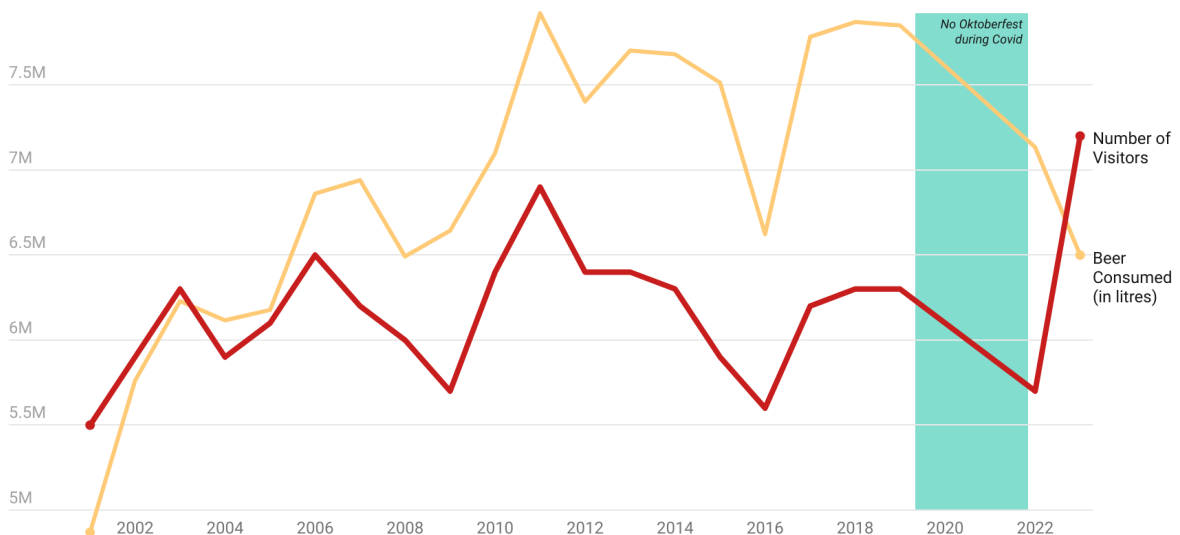
More People, less beer. The Oktoberfest, and Germany arrive in the 21st century.



Oktoberfest 2023 – Picture by Jason Paris, Creative Commons License

Last October marked a historic milestone for the Oktoberfest: over [7.2 million visitors](#) flocked to the festivities on the famed Theresienwiese, more than ever before. However, in the [data](#) published after the jubilation ended, a surprising trend emerged: Even though about 1,5 million (20%) more people attended the celebration than the year before, significantly less beer was consumed (8.5% less).

Number of visitors VS beer consumption at the Oktoberfest



2023 Data amended using the official Oktoberfest preliminary Data

Chart: Martin Assmann • Source: Munich Statistical Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/L0cY3/1/>

With the pandemic well and truly over and a streak of sunny days, this stirred debate and speculation among the German population. This decline is the latest sign in a wider shift in

consumption, especially among young people. A trend echoed in Germany and the rest of Europe.

“Alcohol consumption has been going down generally, but especially in this age group, [12-25] it has been declining strongly,” says Diana Schulz, a spokeswoman of the Federal Center for German Health Education, which has been tracking alcohol consumption for decades.

She attributes this change to a growing sensibilisation of the youth to the risks of alcohol consumption and the fact that “young people in particular are often guided by their group of peers.”

This points to a deeper societal shift, as data shows that these peer groups are affected by changing demographics. The Oktoberfest is still a surprisingly local affair. About [81% of visitors are from Germany](#), with over 60% from its host city Munich.

But looking around, the Oktoberfest looks very different from a few decades ago. Benedikt Gross, a 95-year-old banker who lived his whole life in Munich says that “back in the day, after the war, you would only hear German, Bavarian and English from the visitors. And those talking english were American soldiers. Now you look around and you see half the globe.”

The Oktoberfest is a microcosm of Germany, showing a mix in visitors of dialects, migration background, cultural origin and crucially, relationship to alcohol. But they share one thing in common: Almost all of them live in Germany.

The composition of Germany’s population has become more international than ever before. [Data from the Statistical Office of the German government](#) shows that 28.7% of people living in Germany have a migration background, over twice as much as only 10 years before.

[Data from a research paper in 2021](#), found that migration backgrounds have a significant effect on the alcohol consumption of young people, finding that young men with migration background were up to five times less likely to become strong drinkers than young people without migration background.

Share of people drinking heavily, in relation to their migration background

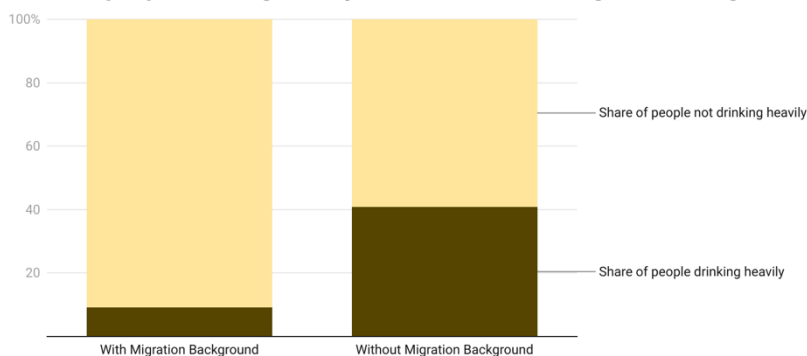


Chart: Martin Assmann • Source: "Changes in binge drinking among adolescents and young adults in Germany depending on educational level and migration background" • Boris Orth and Christina Merkel • Created with Datawrapper

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/TFmfU/1/>

This is a trend that can be observed across Europe, with almost all countries registering a fall in alcohol consumption between 2000 and 2018. A trend only accelerated with covid, [with a paper by Carolin Kilian](#) finding that alcohol use and consumption decreased further during the pandemic.

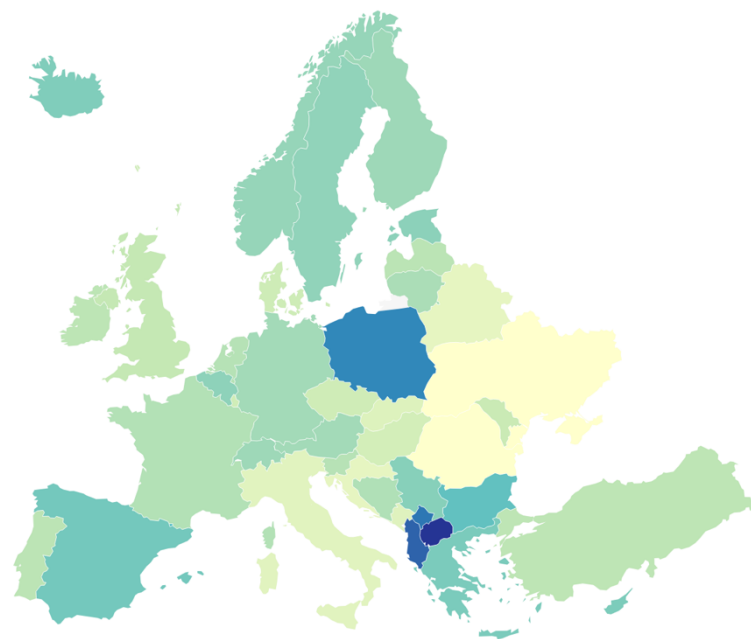
A statistic further underlined by the fact that all countries where alcohol consumption increased by more than 5 per cent have a share of people with a migrant background of under one percent, according to data from Eurostat. In comparison, Germany has a share of foreigners of over 17%.

Growth and Decline in Alcohol Consumption

Evolution of Alcohol Consumption in Europe from 2000 to 2018

Growth Rate (%)

-33% 80%



Map: Martin Assmann • Source: WHO, via the World Bank • Created with Datawrapper

Recommended to view in Datawrapper (<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/dS2cn/1/>)

Many people cheered when the news broke from the Oktoberfest, hoping for a healthier relationship with alcohol and a fall of binge drinking. Heavy drinking has been a problem for the Oktoberfest since its inception, making attendees rowdy and leading to criminal charges. Now, the Police announced that there had been a [reduction of alcohol related crimes](#) at the event, like fist fights and drunk driving.

It wasn't all good news though, as the police also released data showing a record number of violations of the Narcotics Act, with them pointing especially to the consumption of cocaine and cannabis being heavily on the rise.

“While the consumption of alcohol has been in steady decline, we are observing that the consumption of cannabis from young people has almost doubled over 10 years. It went from 13% in the 18–25-year-olds in 2011 to 25% in 2021,” Schulze says.

As Germany moves towards a more polarized society it leads to unforeseen consequences, as highlighted by the recent Oktoberfest statistics and the larger downturn in alcohol consumption. Whether it will lead to a healthy relationship with alcohol and drugs or just a shift in consumption in the youth, “remains yet to be seen,” as Schulze says.

Note: Interviews and some research titles were translated from German by me