

## PRESSEMITTEILUNG

### **BVTE: In Germany, people are smoking less and less, not more**

#### ***Data from the Federal Statistical Office confirm doubts about the increase in smoking rates***

(Berlin, 19 January 2023) Cigarettes are becoming less and less popular in Germany. For the fourth year in a row, sales of taxed cigarettes will decline in 2022, falling well below the 70 billion unit threshold for the first time. The official figures of the Federal Statistical Office confirm considerable doubts about indications of the *German Survey on Smoking Behaviour (DEBRA)* that more people in Germany were consuming tobacco again.

"People are smoking less and less in Germany. That is a fact that cannot be disputed," says Jan Mücke, Chief Executive of the BVTE, "If more smoked, we would have to see that in the sales statistics. The opposite is the case."

According to the *German Survey on Smoking Behaviour (DEBRA)* conducted at the University of Düsseldorf, the proportion of smokers in the total population has increased by around 50 percent since 2020 (from 25.4 percent to 37.6 percent in July 2022). Among underage tobacco users, the prevalence had even almost doubled within one year (increase from 8.7 to 15.9 percent in 2022). According to the DEBRA data, several million adults and around 200,000 minors have (re)started smoking. Such a sporadic increase in smoking prevalence would have to be visibly reflected in government sales statistics - even if the new smokers were only occasional users.

However, fewer cigarettes have been sold in Germany every year since 2019. From 2019 to 2021, cigarette sales fell by 3.6 per cent to 71.7 billion units. This downward trend was not stopped in 2022 either. The Federal Statistical Office reported tax stamp purchases for 60.7 billion units from January to November 2022. This means that eight percent fewer cigarettes were produced for the German market than in the same period of the previous year. For 2022 as a whole, sales of around 67 billion units are expected. Sales of roll-your-own tobacco cannot compensate for this decline, but were also down slightly up to and including November 2022 (-0.6 per cent compared to Jan.-Nov. 2021). Even before the publication of the annual statistics of the Federal Statistical Office, it is thus foreseeable that the negative trend of the previous years will continue in the tobacco market. Sales of tobacco products will continue to decline in 2022. Even the consumption of cigarettes not taxed in Germany last year has not yet reached the level of 2019 - before the start of the corona crisis and the associated mobility restrictions - as the disposal study conducted by the renowned market research institute IPSOS

makes clear.<sup>i</sup> The supposed increase in smoking prevalence shows no discernible effect on demand overall.

The discrepancy between official sales statistics and DEBRA data points to obvious methodological weaknesses in the survey. For example, the alleged increase in the proportion of underage consumers is based on a sample of only about 50 young people - including apparently eight people who reported smoking. Based on this data, any estimate of smoking prevalence is highly uncertain. It is unserious to take a doubling of the estimates as given on this basis. Mücke criticised that such dubious survey results were used to justify misguided demands for regulation: "Tobacco is fully regulated. Adult smokers in Germany already feel unduly patronised and are not reached even with ever new bans and restrictions."

At the same time, the policy fails to expand the range of new alternative products for smokers and to create more opportunities and greater acceptance for potentially risk-reduced nicotine consumption. For example, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture is delaying the regulation of tobacco-free nicotine pouches, which are still not available to smokers in German shops. In this context, the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has stated that "switching from cigarettes to nicotine pouches could represent a reduction in the health risk for a person who smokes".

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.zigarettenverband.de/themen/zahlen-und-fakten/nicht-versteuerter-zigarettenabsatz>