

Germany gives controversial green light to cannabis

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Cannabis aficionados lit up in Germany on Monday, as the country became the largest EU nation to legalize recreational use, despite fierce objections from opposition politicians and medical associations.

Under the first step in the much-debated new law, adults over 18 are now allowed to carry 25 grams of dried cannabis and cultivate up to three marijuana plants at home.

The changes leave Germany with some of the most liberal cannabis laws in Europe, alongside Malta and Luxembourg, which legalized [recreational use](#) in 2021 and 2023, respectively.

The Netherlands, known for its permissive attitude to the drug, has in recent years taken a stricter approach to counter cannabis tourism.

As the law took effect at midnight, some 1,500 people cheered in central Berlin by the Brandenburg Gate, according to police, with some lighting up joints in celebration.

Legalization was "a bit of extra freedom", 25-year-old Niyazi told AFP at the gathering. "You do not feel as under pressure now".

Cannabis consumption has been brought out of the "taboo zone", Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said on X, formerly Twitter.

The new law was "better for real addiction help, prevention for children and young people and for combating the [black market](#)," Lauterbach said, responding in part to criticisms leveled against legalization.

'Disaster'

As the next step in the legal reform, from July 1 it will be possible to legally obtain weed through "cannabis clubs" in the country.

These regulated associations will be allowed to have up to 500 members each, and will be able to distribute up to 50 grams of cannabis per person per month.

Until then, "consumers must not tell the police where they bought their cannabis" in the event of a street check, Georg Wurth, director of the German Cannabis Association, told AFP.

Initial plans for cannabis to be sold via licensed shops were ditched due to EU opposition, though a second law is in the pipeline to trial the sale of the drug in shops in pilot regions.

Medical groups have raised concerns that legalization could lead to an increase in use among young people, who face the highest health risks.

Cannabis use among young people can affect the development of the central nervous system, leading to an increased risk of developing psychosis and schizophrenia, experts have warned.

"From our point of view, the law as it is written is a disaster," Katja Seidel, a therapist at a cannabis addiction center for young people in Berlin, told AFP.

Even Lauterbach, a doctor, has said that [cannabis consumption](#) can be "dangerous", especially for [young people](#).

But the government has promised a widespread information campaign to raise awareness of the risks and to boost support programs.

It has also stressed that cannabis will remain banned for under-18s and within 100 meters of schools, kindergartens and playgrounds.

'Responsible'

The law has likewise drawn criticism from police, who fear it will be difficult to enforce.

"From April 1, our colleagues will find themselves in situations of conflict with citizens, as uncertainty reigns on both sides," said Alexander Poitz, vice-president of the GdP police union.

Another potential issue is the implementation of a retroactive amnesty on cannabis-related offenses, which could create an administrative headache for the legal system.

According to the German Judges' Association, the pardon could apply to more than 200,000 cases that would need to be checked and processed.

Justice Minister Marco Buschmann said the rule change would mean a "one-off increase in workload" for law enforcement during the initial transition phase.

In the long-term however "the burden on the police and judiciary will be relieved", Buschmann told the RND media group.

Conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz has said he would "immediately" repeal the law if he and his party formed a government following nationwide elections in 2025.

On the other side of the debate, Torsten Dietrich, the head of the Cannabis Social Club lobby group, told AFP the legalization law "could go a lot further".

The move did however mean the "decriminalization of several million people in Germany who have been senselessly discriminated against", Dietrich said at Monday's rally.

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