GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

Bulgaria briefing:
Symptom awareness, attitudes to lung cancer and views on screening
Findings from a global survey

Overview

The Global Lung Cancer Coalition (GLCC) is a partnership of 44 patient organisations across 32 nations / territories, working to improve lung cancer awareness, reduce stigma and improve outcomes.

The GLCC Patient Charter asserts that all people with lung cancer have the right to dignity, respect, quality care, informed decision making, privacy and freedom from blame and stigma.

Public perceptions can significantly affect these rights. Stigma and low symptom awareness may delay help-seeking and diagnosis, making it important to understand attitudes towards lung cancer.

In 2026, the GLCC conducted a global study to explore public attitudes to lung cancer, awareness of symptoms and views on screening. The research builds on studies undertaken in 2010, 2013, 2017 and 2023.

The GLCC is calling on governments and health systems across the world to:

- Increase recognition of lung cancer symptoms through targeted public awareness campaigns
- Challenge stigma and misconceptions through evidence-based awareness initiatives
- Implement national lung cancer screening programmes to support earlier detection and treatment
- Ensure equitable access to screening, diagnosis and care for all people affected by lung cancer

This briefing sets out the key findings from Bulgaria in 2026 and how they compare with other countries included in the survey. The results highlight three key themes:

- **Awareness of lung cancer symptoms** is relatively low, with Bulgaria ranking among the countries with the lowest levels of symptom recognition.
- **Levels of stigma** towards people with lung cancer remain significant, with more than four in ten respondents reporting less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other types of cancer.
- **Public support for lung cancer screening** is very strong, with almost nine in ten respondents supporting a national screening programme.

Key findings: Bulgaria (2026)

Symptom recognition

- Almost **half** of people responding to the survey (**45.2%**) could not name any symptoms of lung cancer. This places Bulgaria among the countries with the lowest levels of symptom recognition surveyed, meaning a substantial proportion of the public still lacks awareness of potential warning signs.
- Men were more likely than women to report not knowing any symptoms (**47.8% vs. 42.8%**).
- Lack of symptom awareness was highest among **18-24 year-olds** (**57.6%**) compared with **41.8%** among those **aged 45-54.**
- People who had never smoked and people who currently smoke or have smoked in the past reported similar levels of symptom awareness (**45% vs 44.4%** reporting they did not know any symptoms).

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- More than **four in ten** people (**41%**) agreed they had less sympathy for people with lung cancer than other cancers, down from **45.2%** in **2023**. This is higher than the **global average** (**39.2%**), suggesting stigma surrounding lung cancer remains a challenge in Bulgaria.
- Men were more likely than women to hold this view (**46.6% vs. 35.8%**).
- People **aged 45-54** were least likely to agree with the statement (**33.1%**), compared with **47.4%** of those **aged 25-34**.
- People who currently smoke or have smoked in the past were less sympathetic than people who have never smoked (**41.5% vs. 37.6%** agreeing they had less sympathy).

Views on lung cancer screening

- Almost **nine in ten** people (**88.7%**) supported a national lung cancer screening programme. Although slightly lower than in **2023** (**89.9%**), public support remains overwhelmingly strong.
- Women were more supportive than men (**90.6% vs. 86.7%**).
- Support generally increased with age, from **84.8%** among **18-24 year-olds** to **93.7%** among those **aged 55 and over.**
- People who currently smoke or have smoked in the past were more supportive than people who have never smoked (**89.4% vs. 85%**).

Methodology

The GLCC commissioned the market research agency Censuswide to undertake an online survey of adults across 32 countries between 17 March 2026 – 24 March 2026. The survey samples included 1,000 adults from Bulgaria and data was weighted using age, gender and region to produce a representative sample in each country. Respondents were asked the following questions:

- Q1. There are many warning signs and symptoms of lung cancer. Please list as many symptoms of lung cancer as you can think of [a tick box was provided for 'Don't know'].
- Q2. Lung cancer is mainly caused by smoking cigarettes and other tobacco products. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer.
- Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: There should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early.

Further analysis

Symptom recognition

Raising awareness of lung cancer symptoms is vital, as earlier diagnosis improves treatment outcomes.

In 2026, 45.2% of people in Bulgaria said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer, underlining the continued need for public awareness campaigns. Among those who could identify symptoms, responses were concentrated around the most common warning signs, particularly persistent coughs, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing and coughing up blood. Awareness of other recognised symptoms, including recurrent chest infections, persistent tiredness and loss of appetite, appeared to be substantially lower, suggesting public understanding remains focused on the most prominent respiratory symptoms of lung cancer.

Bulgaria compares less favourably with many other countries in the survey, recording the second-highest proportion of people unable to identify any symptoms. Awareness therefore remains far from universal, highlighting opportunities to further improve public understanding of lung cancer symptoms.

Chart 1. Percentage of respondents who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by country

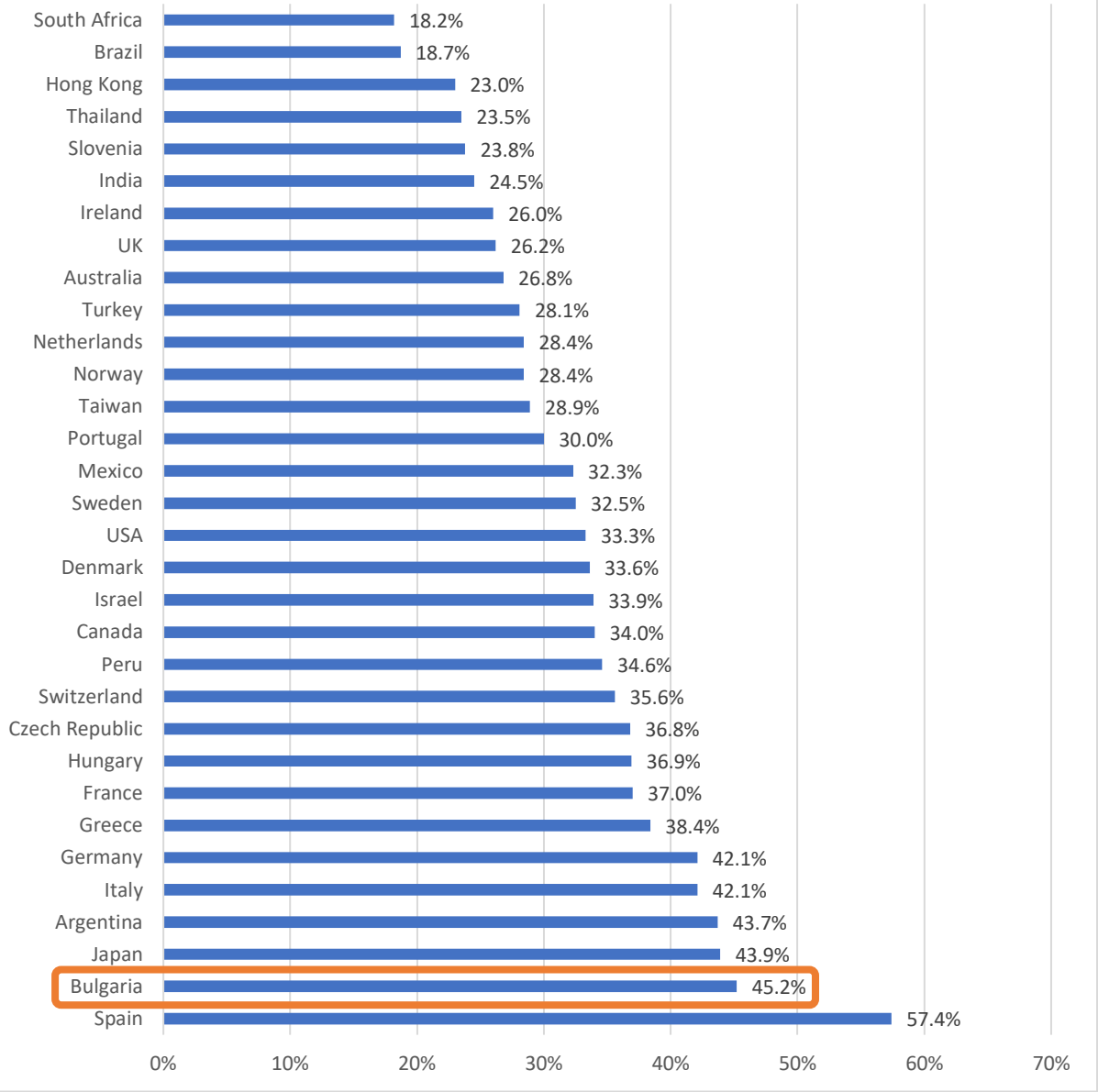


Chart 2. Percentage of respondents in Bulgaria who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by age

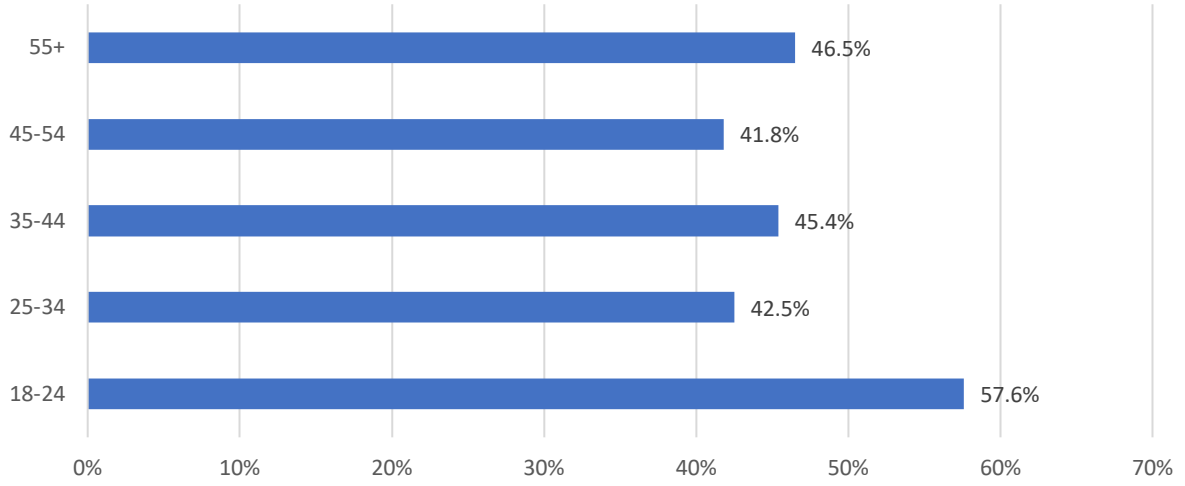
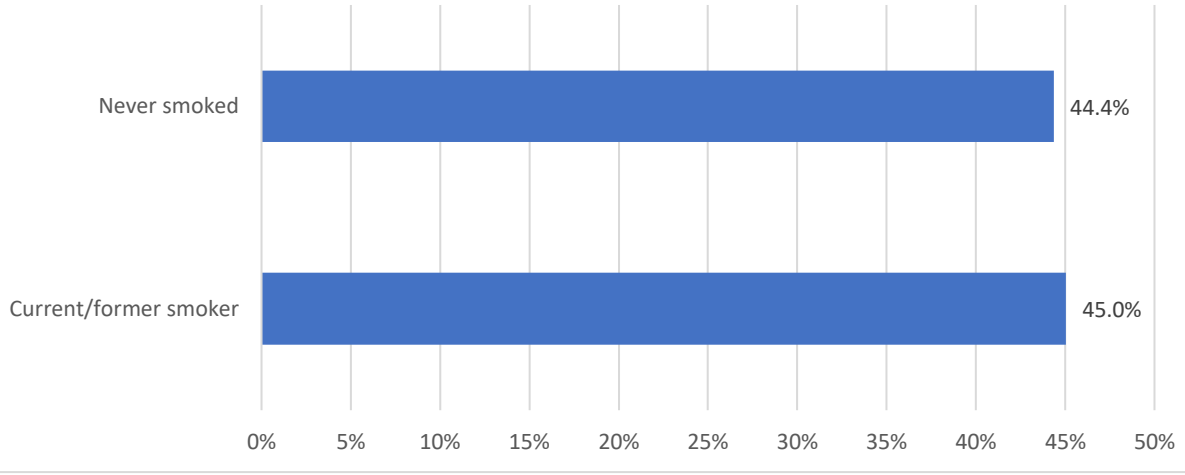


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in Bulgaria who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by smoking status



Attitudes towards lung cancer

Around 60-70% of lung cancer cases are linked to smoking, which can contribute to stigma and blame associated with the disease.[1] This is concerning because lung cancer can affect people regardless of smoking history, while stigma and misconceptions may discourage some individuals from seeking medical advice when symptoms first appear. The GLCC believes that everyone living with lung cancer deserves access to high-quality treatment and care, regardless of the cause of their cancer.

In Bulgaria, 41% of respondents agreed with the statement that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, down from 45.2% in 2023. This is higher than the global average (39.2%), representing a substantial proportion of the population and highlights the persistence of stigma surrounding lung cancer.

[1] World Health Organization (2026) *Lung cancer*. Available at: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/lung-cancer (Accessed: 11 August 2026)

Chart 4. Percentage of respondents who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by country

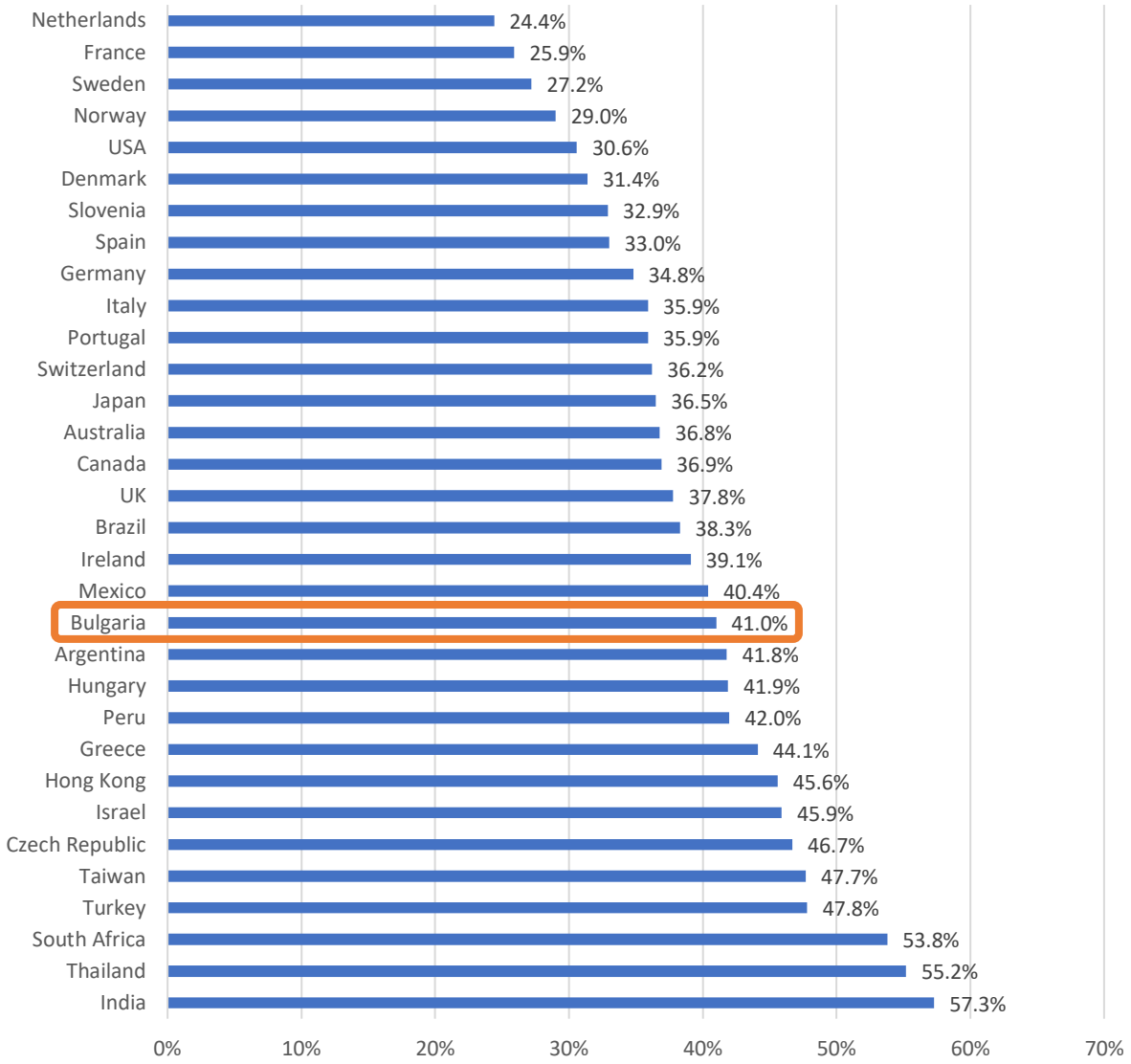


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in Bulgaria who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by age

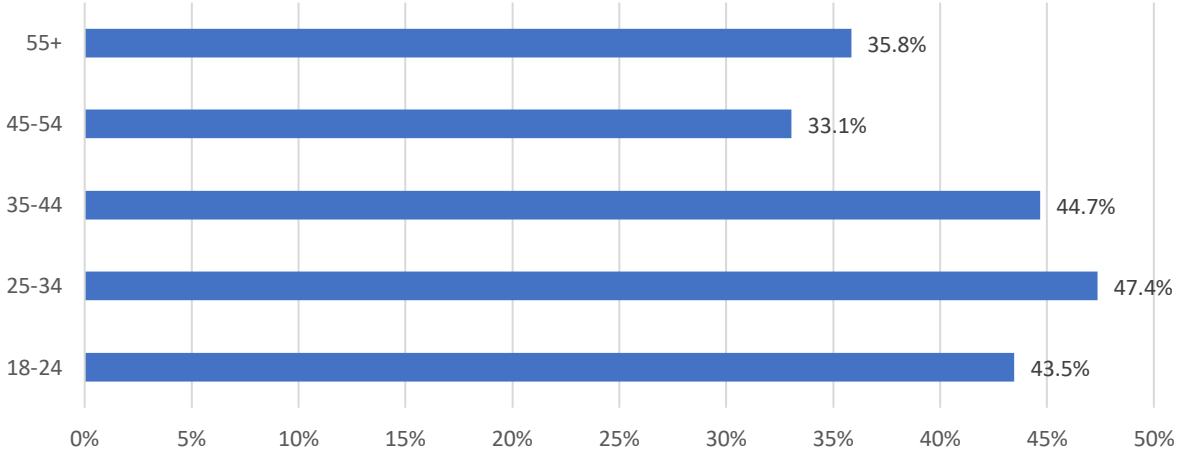
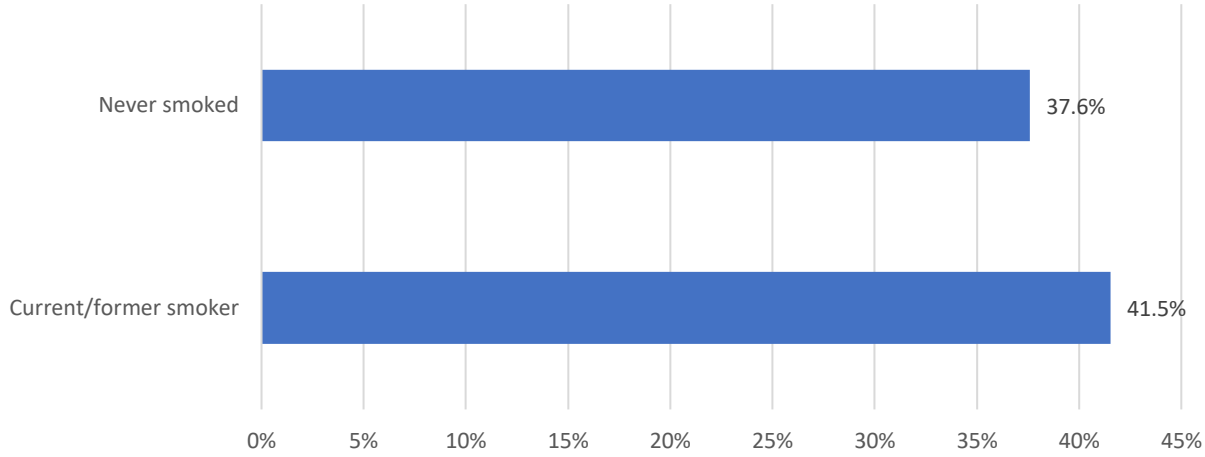


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in Bulgaria who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by smoking status



Views on lung cancer screening

A national lung cancer screening programme is a key measure to reduce the substantial burden that lung cancer places on individuals, families and healthcare systems. Lung cancer screening using low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) can save lives by detecting the disease at an earlier, more treatable stage. A large clinical trial found that LDCT screening reduced lung cancer mortality by 24% in men and 33% in women after 10 years of follow-up compared with no screening.[2]

Support for lung cancer screening remains very strong in Bulgaria, with 88.7% of respondents agreeing that there should be a national screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early. Although this represents a slight decrease from 89.9% in 2023, public support is overwhelmingly high, with almost nine in ten people backing screening.

Bulgaria does not currently have a national lung cancer screening programme. Given the high level of public support identified in this survey and the evidence demonstrating the benefits of lung cancer screening, there is an opportunity to explore approaches that could improve access to earlier detection, particularly for people at greatest risk of developing lung cancer.

[2] de Koning, H.J., van der Aalst, C.M., de Jong, P.A. *et al.* (2020) 'Reduced Lung-Cancer Mortality with Volume CT Screening in a Randomized Trial', *New England Journal of Medicine*, 382(6), pp. 503-513. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa1911793

Chart 7. Percentage of respondents who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by country

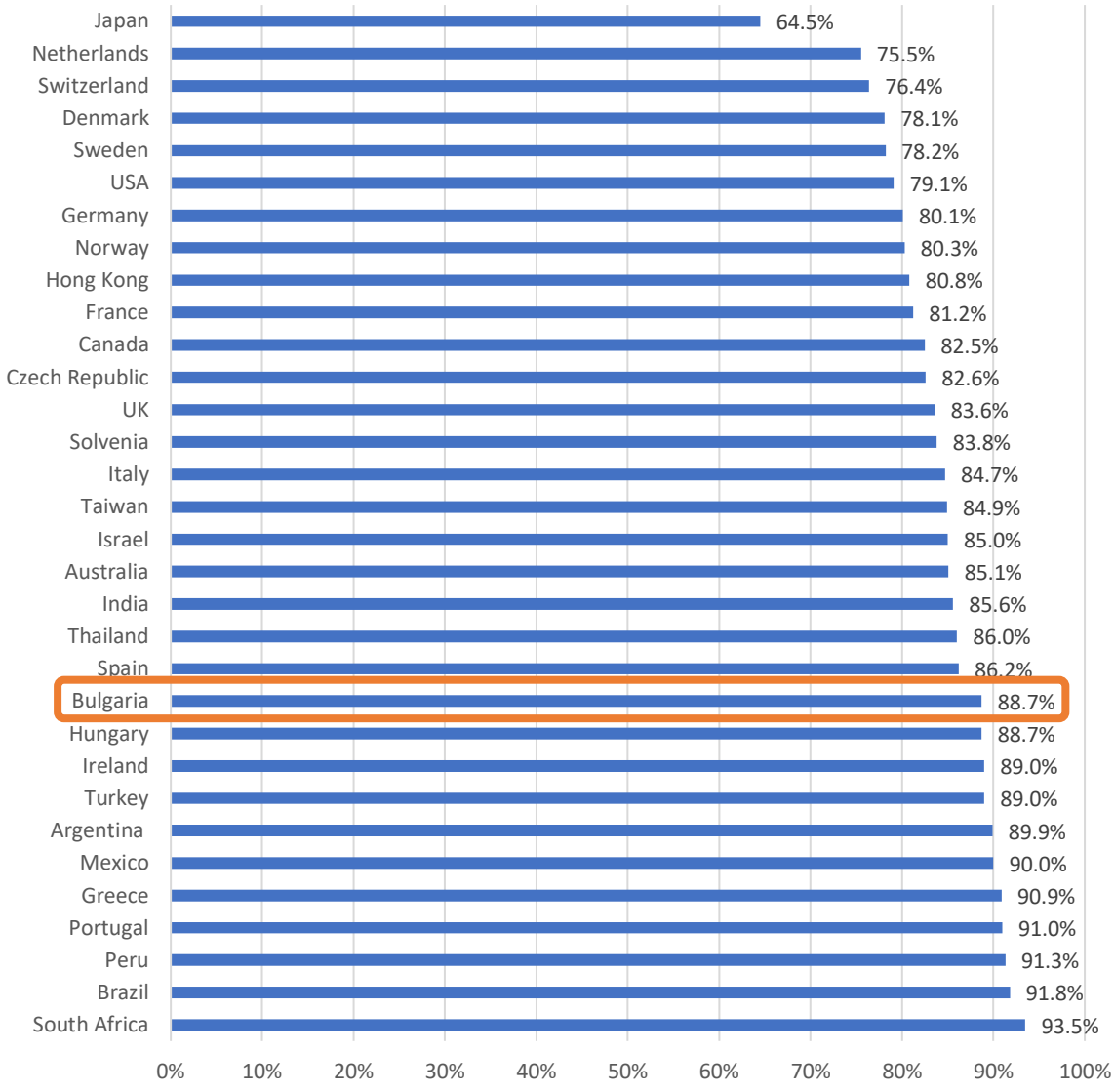


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in Bulgaria who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by age

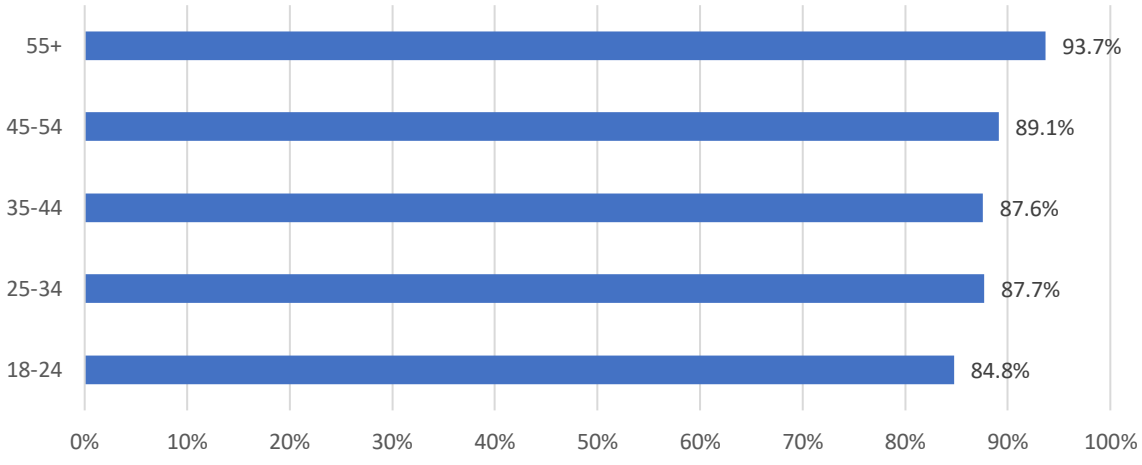
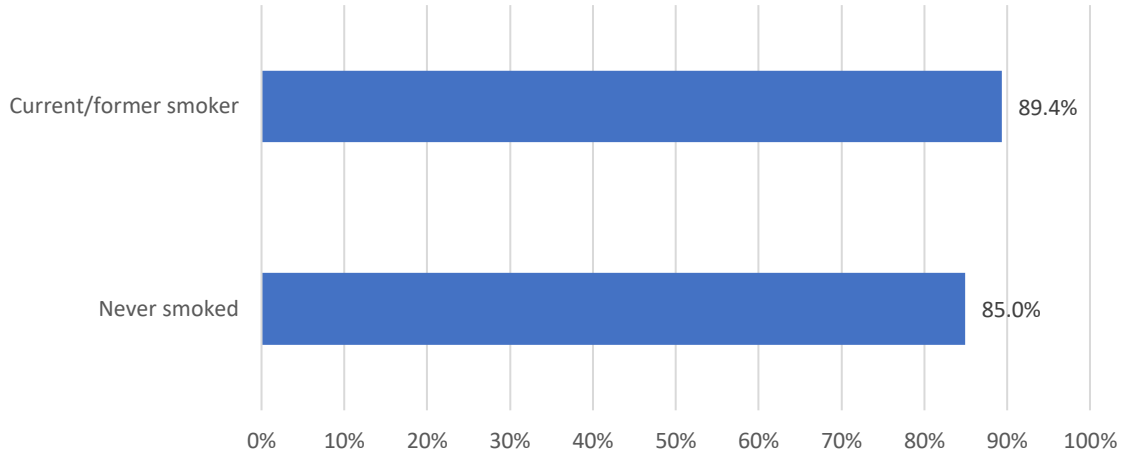


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in Bulgaria who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by smoking status



Conclusion

The 2026 findings show that, although public support for screening in Bulgaria remains overwhelmingly strong, important challenges remain. Awareness of lung cancer symptoms remains exceptionally low compared with other countries, with almost half of people unable to identify a single symptom. At the same time, stigma surrounding lung cancer remains persistent, with more than four in ten people reporting less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other cancers.

Public support for lung cancer screening is overwhelmingly strong, with 88.7% supporting a national screening programme. This demonstrates strong public backing for efforts to improve earlier diagnosis and reduce the burden of lung cancer.

These findings highlight the need for continued investment in public awareness, action to challenge stigma and misconceptions, and ongoing efforts to improve access to early detection and diagnosis. The GLCC will use these findings to support advocacy and awareness activities aimed at improving outcomes for everyone affected by lung cancer in Bulgaria.

More information

Established in 2001, the GLCC comprises 44 non-government patient organisations from 32 nations / territories: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, UK and USA.

The GLCC promotes global understanding of lung cancer and the right of patients to effective early detection, better treatment and supportive care. By serving as the international voice of lung cancer patients, the GLCC is committed to improving disease outcomes for all.

For more information about this study and the work of the GLCC please visit: www.lungcancercoalition.org or email our secretariat at: glcc@roycastle.org.