GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

Portugal 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 Portugal 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 high, with Portugal among the countries with higher levels of symptom recognition, although 30.0% of respondents were still unable to identify a single symptom of lung cancer.
- **Stigma towards people with lung cancer** remains significant**,** with more than a third of respondents reporting less sympathy for people with lung cancer than those with other types of cancer, although Portugal reported stigma was slightly below the global average.
- **Public support for lung cancer screening** is exceptionally strong**,** with Portugal recording one of the highest levels of support among all countries included in the survey, demonstrating strong public backing for a national screening programme and efforts to improve earlier diagnosis.

Key findings: Portugal

Symptom recognition

- **Three in ten** people responding to the survey (**30.0%**) said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer, up from **27.7%** in **2023,** but still placing Portugal among the countries with higher levels of symptom awareness in the survey.
- Men were more likely than women to report not knowing any symptoms (**33.1% vs. 27.6%**).
- Lack of symptoms awareness was highest among people **aged 18-24** (**35.1%**), and lowest with those **aged 55 and over** (**24.6%**).
- People who had never smoked were more likely than those who currently smoke or had smoked previously to report not knowing any symptoms (**34.8% vs. 28.1%**).

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- Almost **four in ten** respondents (**35.9%**) said they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer, **unchanged from 2023** and below the **2026 global average** of **39.2%**.
- Men were more likely than women to report less sympathy towards people with lung cancer (**44.8% vs. 29.0%**).
- Reported stigma was highest among people aged **18-24** (**41.2%**), and lowest among those **aged 55 and over** (**25.4%**).
- People who currently smoke or had smoked previously were substantially more likely than those who had never smoked to express less sympathy towards people with lung cancer (**39.1% vs. 26.0%**).

Views on lung cancer screening

- More than **nine in ten** respondents (**91.0%**) agreed there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, down slightly from **93.2%** in **2023** but still one of the highest levels of support recorded in the survey.
- Women and men reported similarly high levels of support for a national lung cancer screening programme (**91.7% vs. 90.1%**).
- Support was highest among people **aged 45-54** (**95.2%**), although it exceeded **89%** across **all age groups**.
- Support was similarly high among people who currently smoke or had smoked previously and those who had never smoked (**90.9% vs. 91.2%**).

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 Portugal 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 important, as recognising potential symptoms and seeking medical advice can support earlier diagnosis and better outcomes.

In 2026, 30.0% of people in Portugal said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer, up from 27.7% in 2023. This places Portugal among the countries with comparatively high levels of symptom awareness. However, almost one in three people were still unable to identify any symptoms of lung cancer, highlighting the importance of continued awareness efforts.

Among respondents who could identify symptoms, the most commonly recognised were shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, persistent cough, coughing up blood, and chest pain. Respondents

also identified fatigue, unexplained weight loss, hoarseness, back pain, loss of appetite, and recurrent respiratory infections.

The findings suggest that awareness in Portugal is concentrated around a number of commonly recognised symptoms, while awareness of the broader range of potential lung cancer symptoms remains more limited.

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

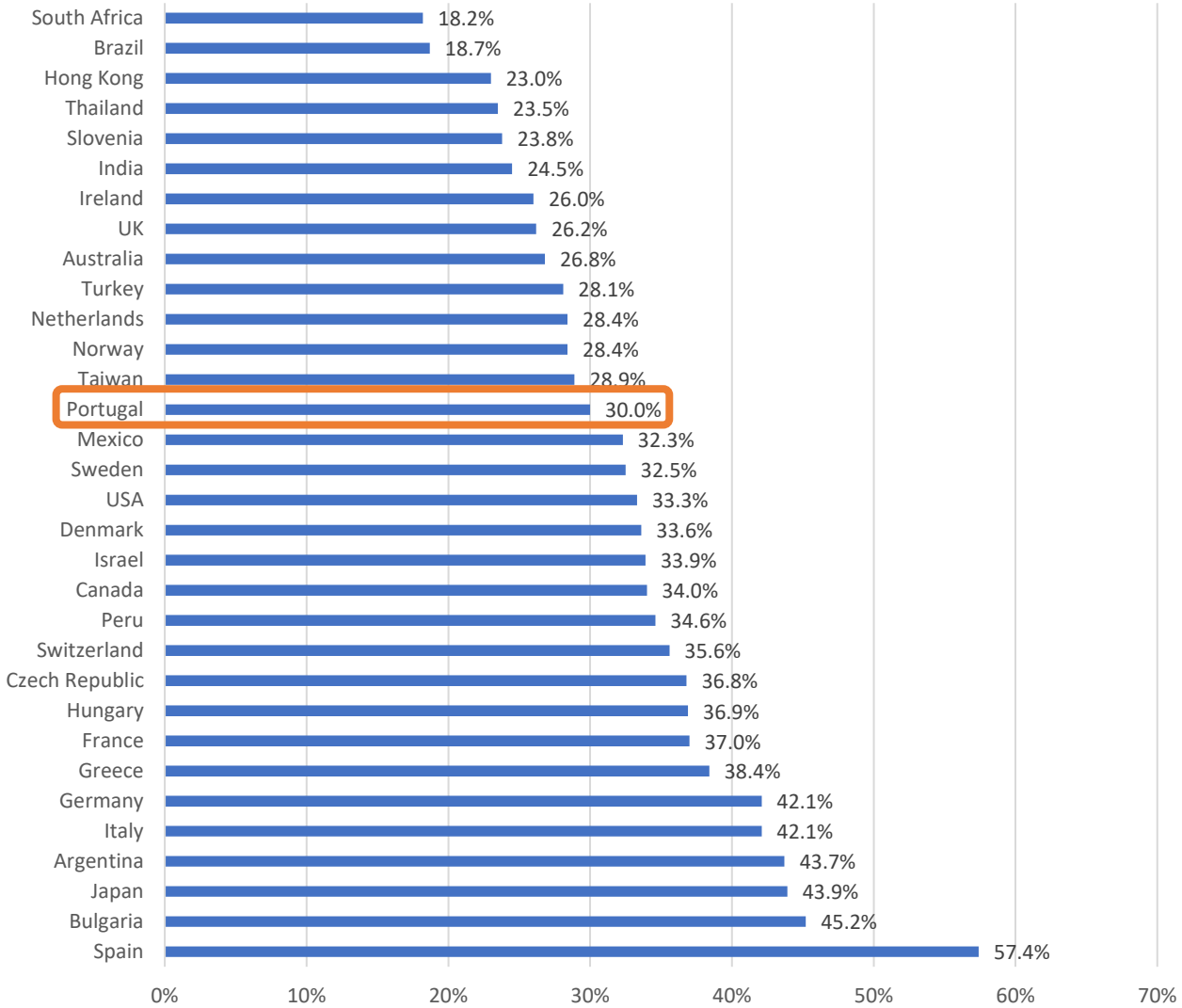


Chart 2. Percentage of respondents in Portugal who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by age

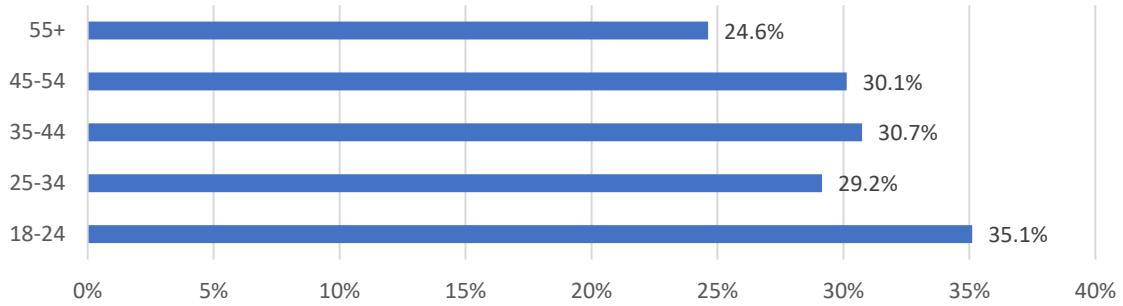
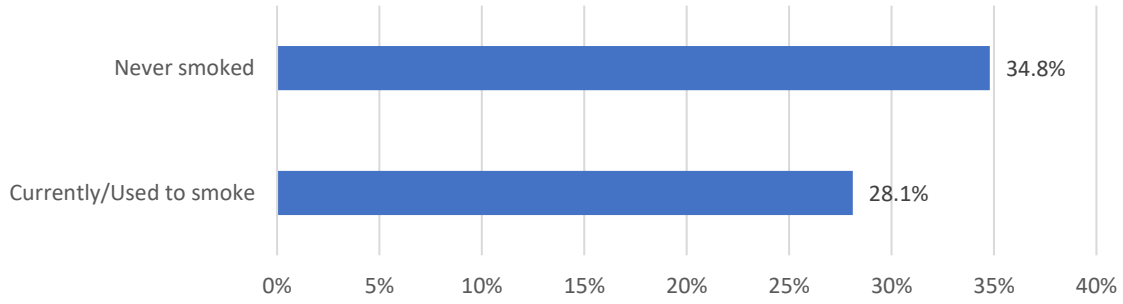


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in Portugal who indicated they did not know any symptoms of smoking, by status



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 Portugal, 35.9% of respondents agreed with the statement that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for people with other types of cancer, unchanged from 2023. This is below the 2026 global average of 39.2% and places Portugal among the countries with lower levels of stigma in the survey. However, more than a third of respondents still expressed this view, indicating stigma remains an important issue. These findings reinforce the need for continued efforts to improve understanding of lung cancer and challenge blame and stigma associated with the disease.

[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

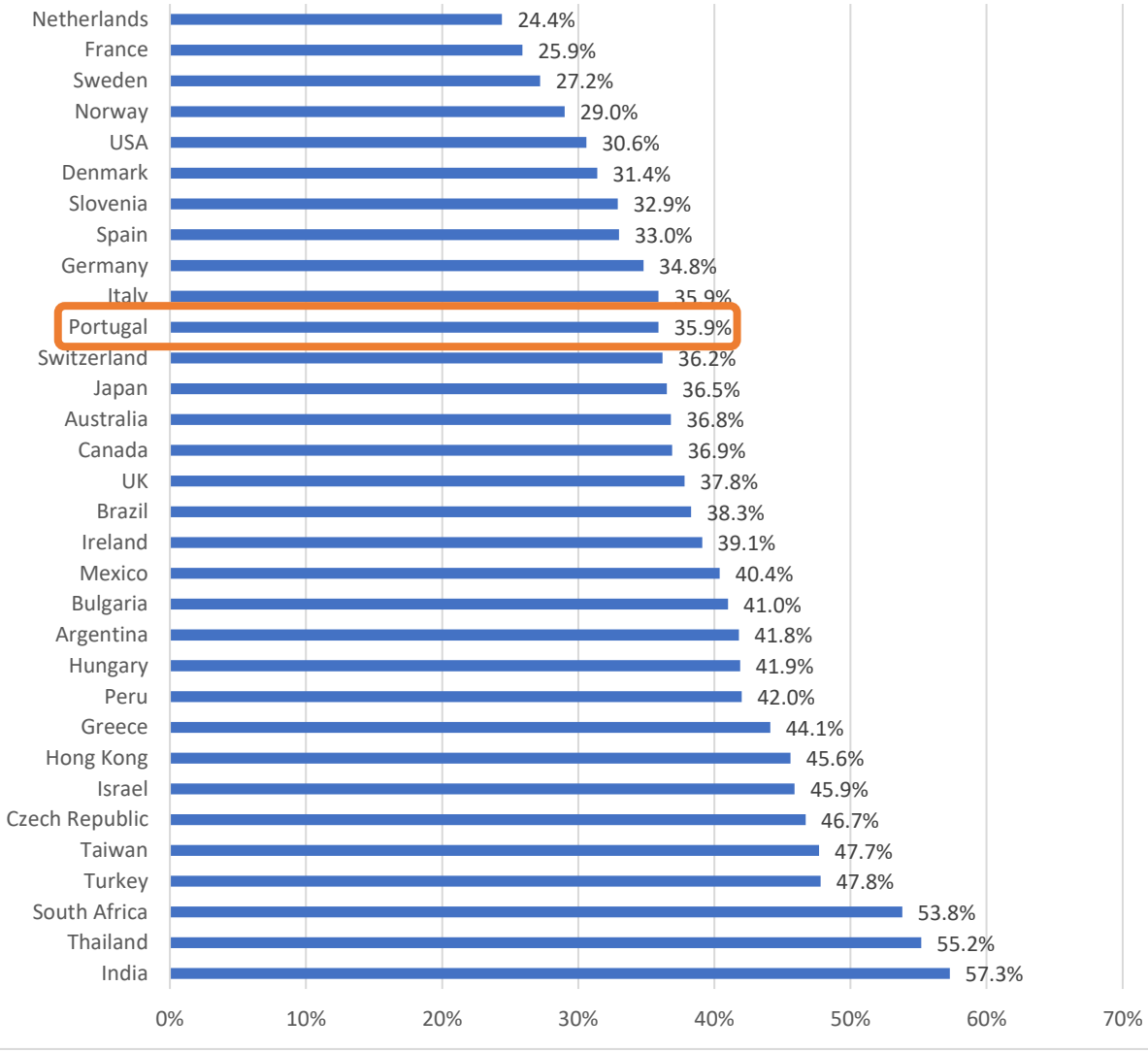


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in Portugal who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by age

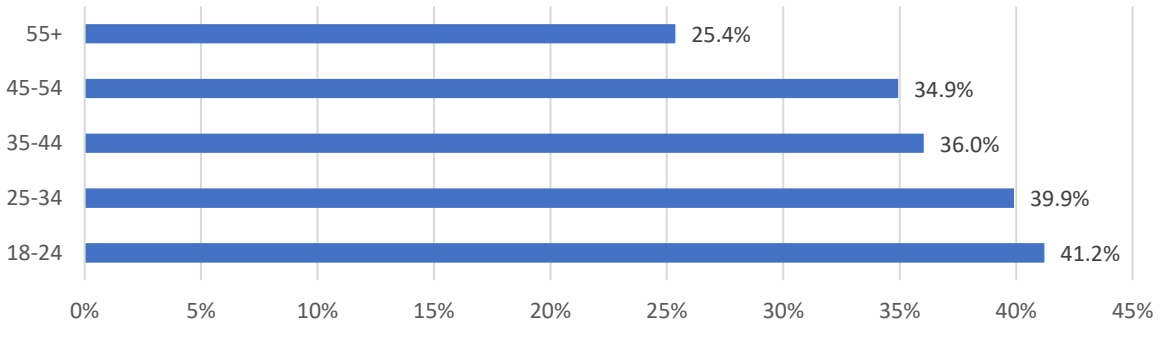
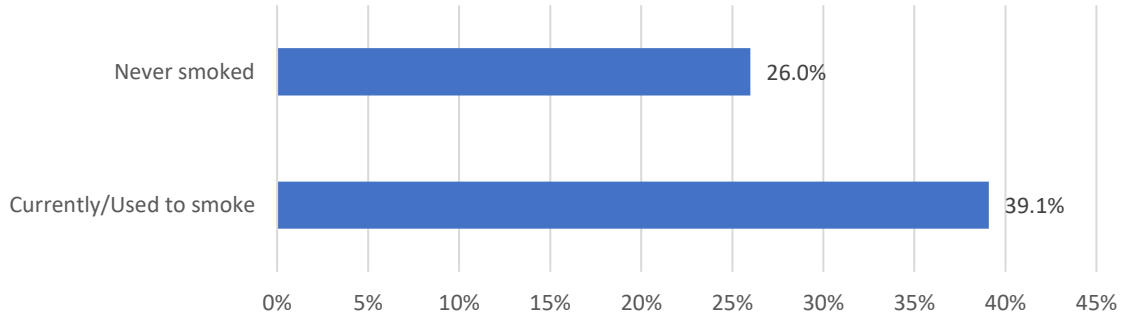


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in Portugal who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by smoking status



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 was extremely strong in Portugal, with 91.0% of respondents agreeing that there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early. While this was slightly down from 93.2% in 2023, Portugal recorded one of the highest levels of support among all countries included in the survey.

Portugal does not currently have a national lung cancer screening programme. However, growing evidence from Portugal highlights the potential benefits of implementing screening. Recent research using real-world Portuguese data found that a national lung cancer screening programme could substantially increase the proportion of lung cancers diagnosed at an early stage, when treatment is more effective and survival outcomes are improved.[3] Against this backdrop, the very strong public support identified in this survey, with 91.0% of respondents backing a national screening programme, provides a strong foundation for efforts to expand access to early detection and improve outcomes for people at risk of 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

[3] Fonseca A.C., Soares M.A.S., Ferro F.M. *et al.* (2026) 'Estimating the potential impact of a national lung cancer screening program in Portugal using real-world NSCLC data', *ESMO Open*. Available at: https://www.esmoopen.com/article/S2059-7029(26)00515-6/fulltext

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

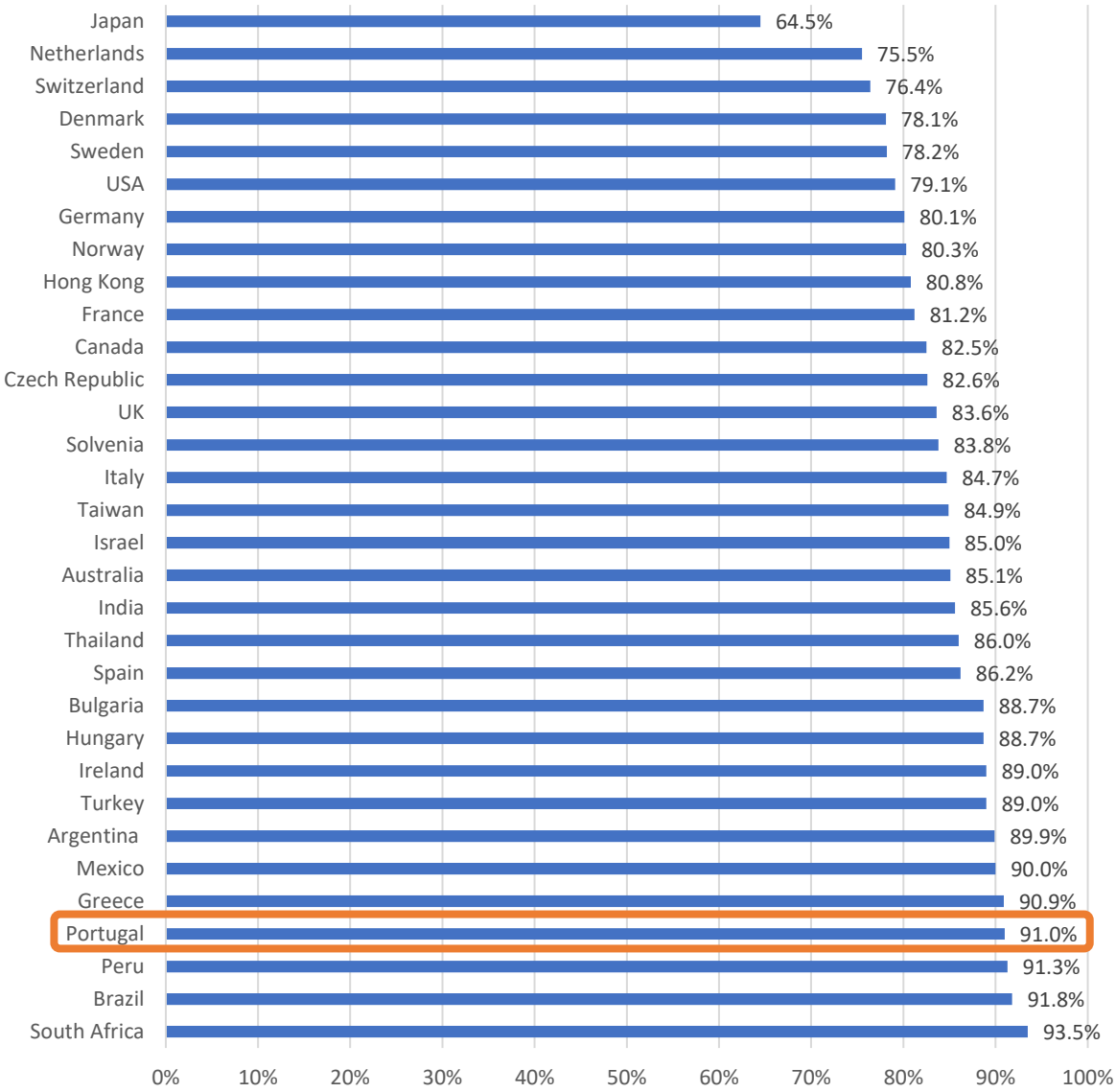


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in Portugal who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by age

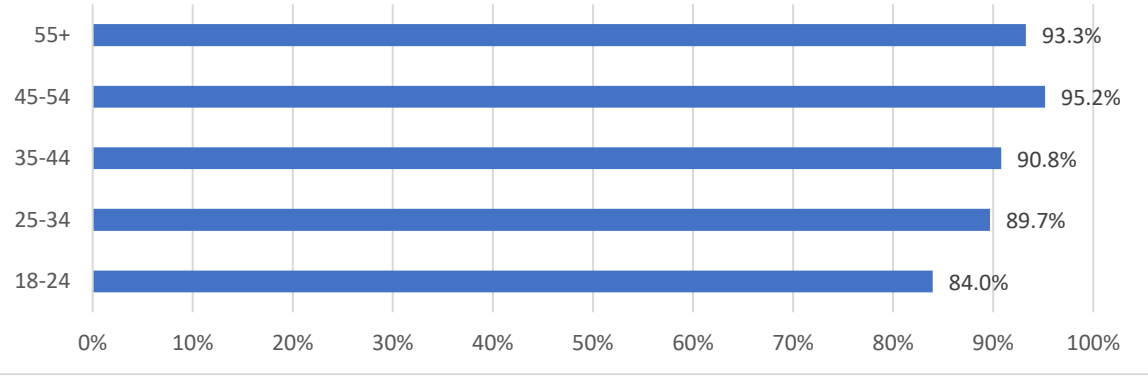
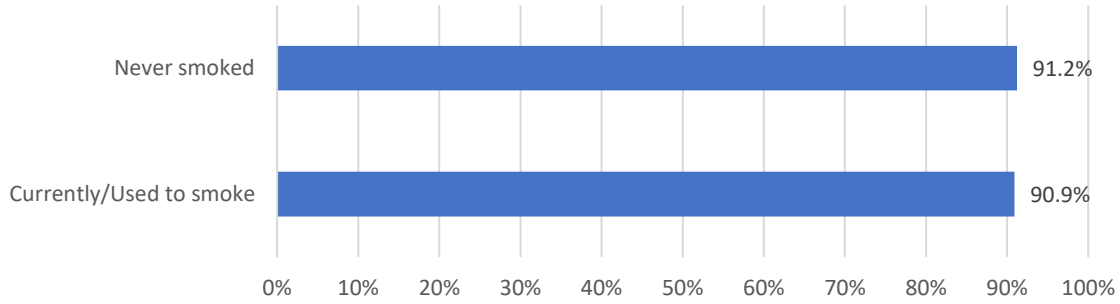


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in Portugal who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by smoking status



Conclusion

The 2026 findings show that Portugal performs relatively well on symptom awareness and records some of the strongest public support for lung cancer screening among all countries included in the survey. Awareness of lung cancer symptoms is higher than in many other countries, although 30.0% of people were still unable to identify a single symptom of lung cancer.

Levels of stigma towards people with lung cancer are lower than the global average, but 35.9% of respondents reported less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other cancers, demonstrating that misconceptions and blame associated with the disease remain a challenge.

Public support for lung cancer screening is exceptionally strong, with 91.0% of respondents supporting a national screening programme. This provides a strong foundation for efforts to improve earlier diagnosis and reduce the burden of lung cancer in Portugal.

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 Portugal.

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.