GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

Spain 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 Spain in 2026 and how they compare with other countries included in the survey. The results highlight three key themes:

- **Awareness of lung cancer symptoms** remains particularly low, with Spain recording the highest proportion of people unable to identify any symptoms of lung cancer among all countries surveyed.
- **Levels of stigma** towards people with lung cancer remain a concern, highlighting the need for greater public understanding of the disease and its causes.
- **Public support for lung cancer screening** is strong, with Spain ranking amongst the countries which are most supportive of earlier diagnosis through a national screening programme.

Key findings: Spain

Symptom recognition

- More than **half** of people responding to the survey (**57.4%**) could not name any symptoms of lung cancer, the highest proportion among all countries surveyed and a marked increase from **40%** in **2023**.
- Lack of symptom awareness was highest among people **aged 55 and over** (**65.9%**).
- People who have never smoked were more likely than people who currently smoke or have smoked in the past to report not knowing any symptoms (**62.9% vs. 55%**).
- Across **all age groups**, more than **half** of respondents were unable to name a symptom of lung cancer, highlighting substantial awareness gaps across the population.

Attitudes towards lung cancer

- Around **one-third** of respondents in Spain (**33%**) reported having less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for those with other cancers.
- While lower than the **global average** (**39.2%**), this still represents a considerable proportion of the population, despite Spain reporting comparatively lower levels of lung cancer stigma.
- This view was more common among younger respondents, with **45.3%** of those **aged 18-24 year-olds** agreeing they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than those with other cancers, compared with **27.3%** of people **aged 55 and over**.
- Attitudes were broadly similar regardless of smoking history, with **32.1%** of people who had never smoked and **33.8%** of current and former smokers reporting less sympathy.

Views on lung cancer screening

- Almost **nine in ten** respondents in Spain (**86.2%**) supported a national lung cancer screening programme, ranking among the countries with the highest public support for lung cancer screening.
- Support was high among both women and men, although higher among women (**83.1% vs. 89.2%**).
- Support generally increased with age, rising from **73.6%** among **18-24 year-olds** to **89.1%** among those **aged 45-54 year-olds**.
- Support was high regardless of smoking history, although current and former smokers were slightly more supportive than those who had never smoked (**87.2% vs. 84.3%**).

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 Spain 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, 57.4% of people surveyed in Spain said they did not know any symptoms of lung cancer. This was the highest proportion recorded among the 32 countries included in the survey, suggesting that public awareness of lung cancer symptoms remains a significant challenge. Among those who were able to identify symptoms, responses were concentrated around a small number of well-recognised lung cancer warning signs, including persistent cough, breathlessness, coughing up blood, and chest pain.

Awareness of other symptoms was much lower, with relatively few respondents identifying hoarseness, wheezing, recurrent chest infections or loss of appetite. Several recognised symptoms of lung cancer, including difficulty swallowing, swelling of the face or neck and finger clubbing, were rarely mentioned or not identified at all.

These findings underscore the importance of increasing public awareness of the broader range of lung cancer symptoms in Spain to promote earlier presentation, and diagnosis, and improve access to treatment.

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

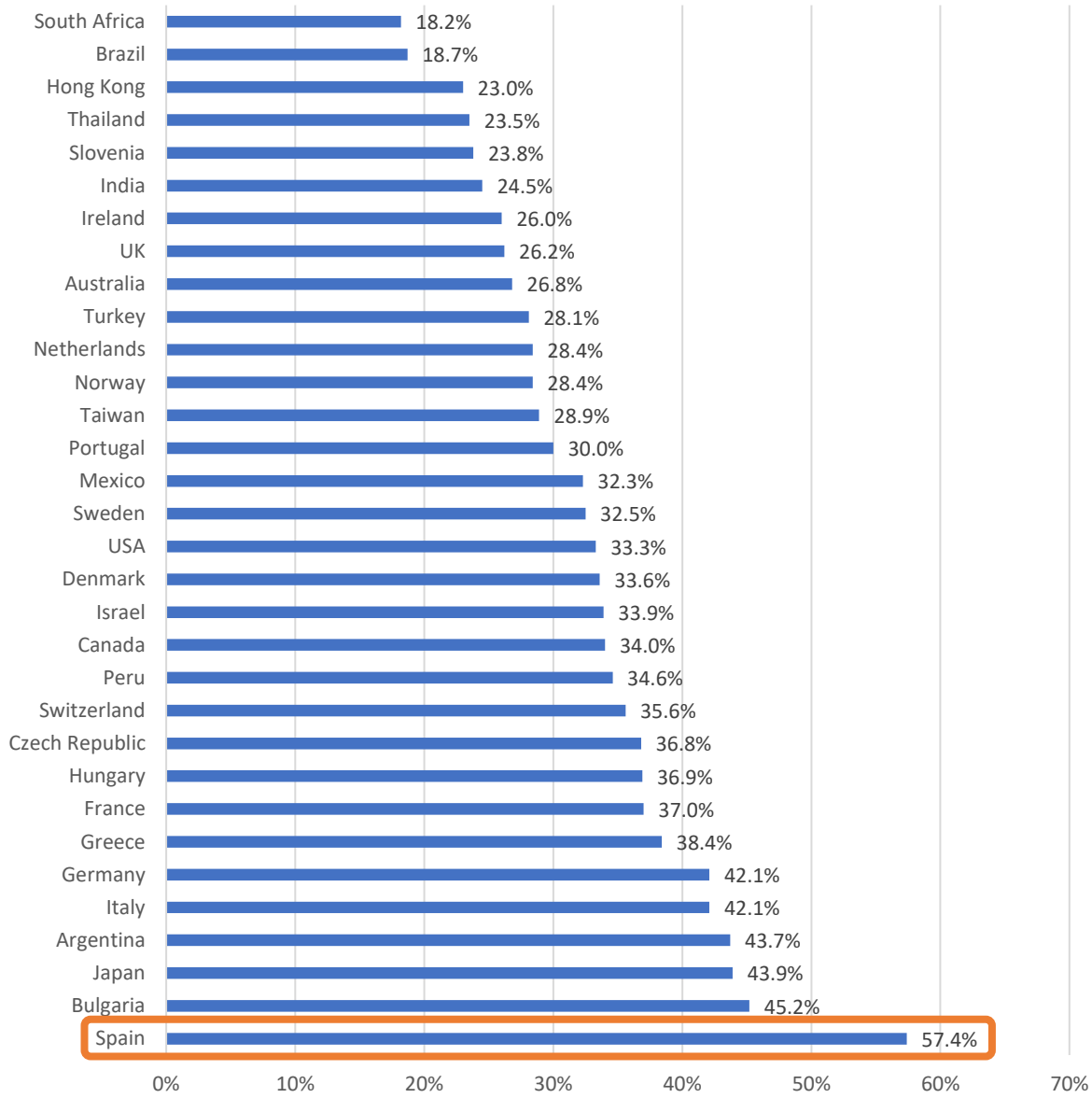


Chart 2. Percentage of respondents in Spain who indicated they did not know any symptoms, by age

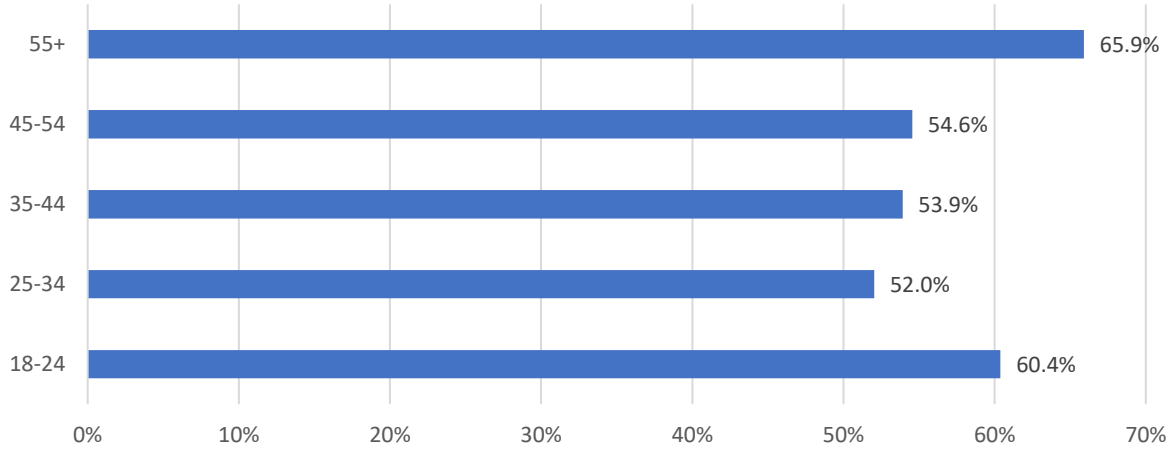
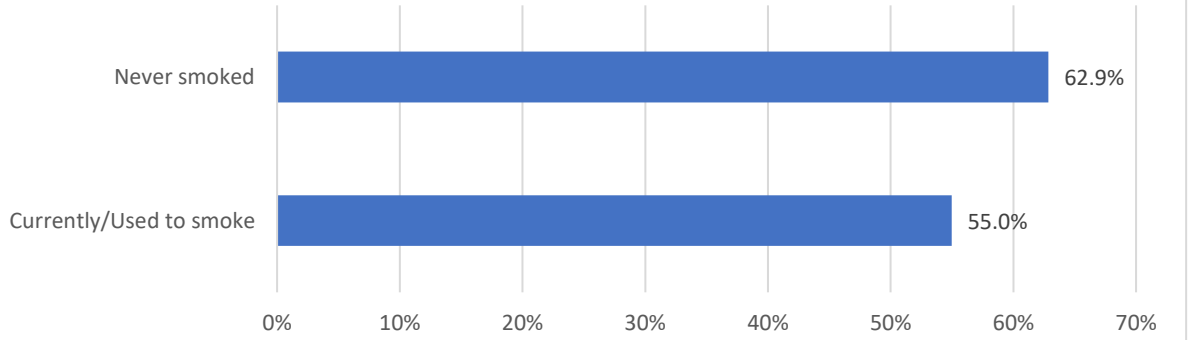


Chart 3. Percentage of respondents in Spain who indicated they did not know any symptoms of smoking, by status



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.

Spain reported comparatively lower levels of stigma towards people with lung cancer, with 33% of respondents agreeing with the statement that they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, compared with a global average of 39.2%. However, the fact that around one-third of respondents expressed this view indicates that stigma remains an important concern.

[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

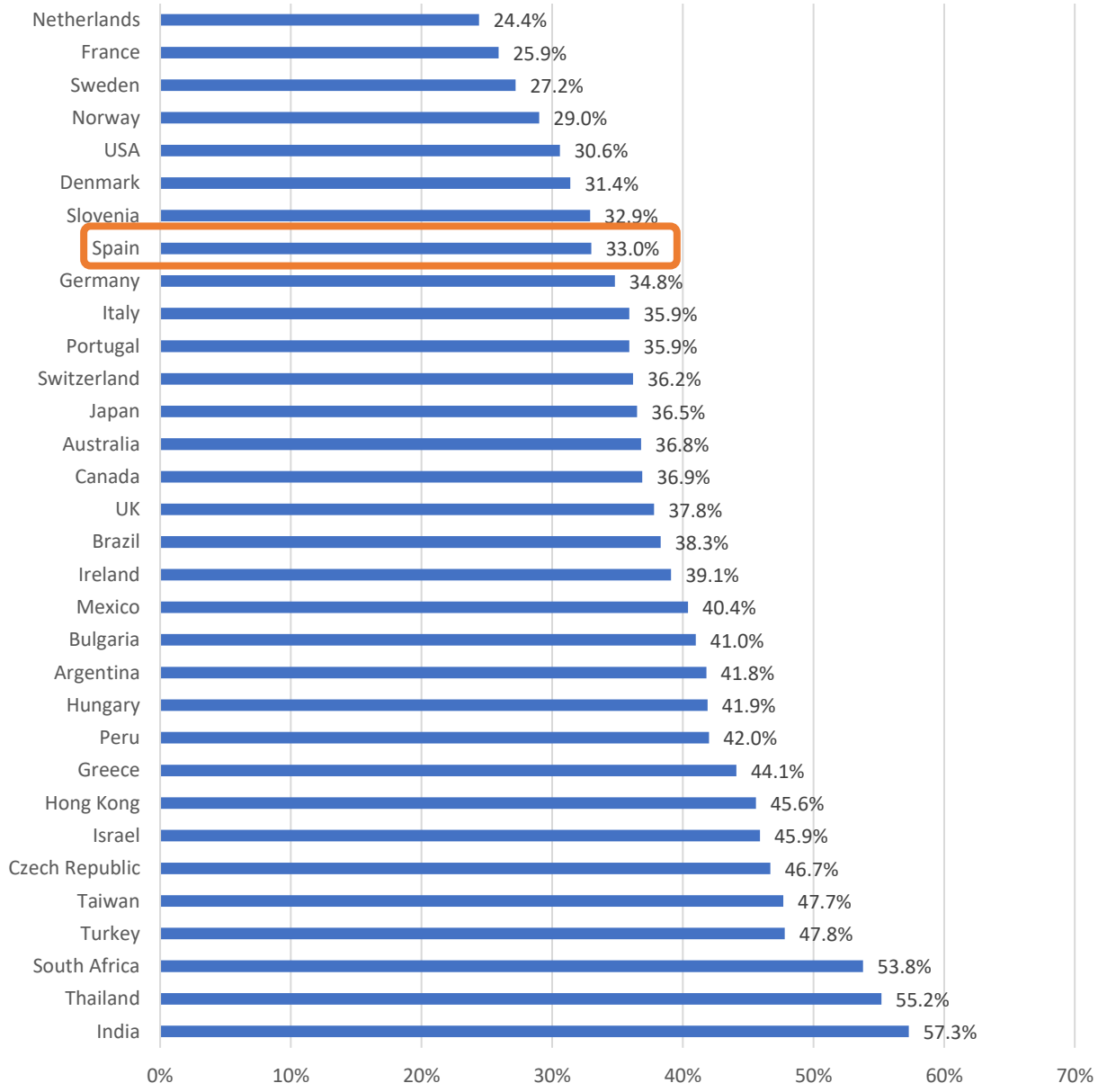


Chart 5. Percentage of respondents in Spain who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by age

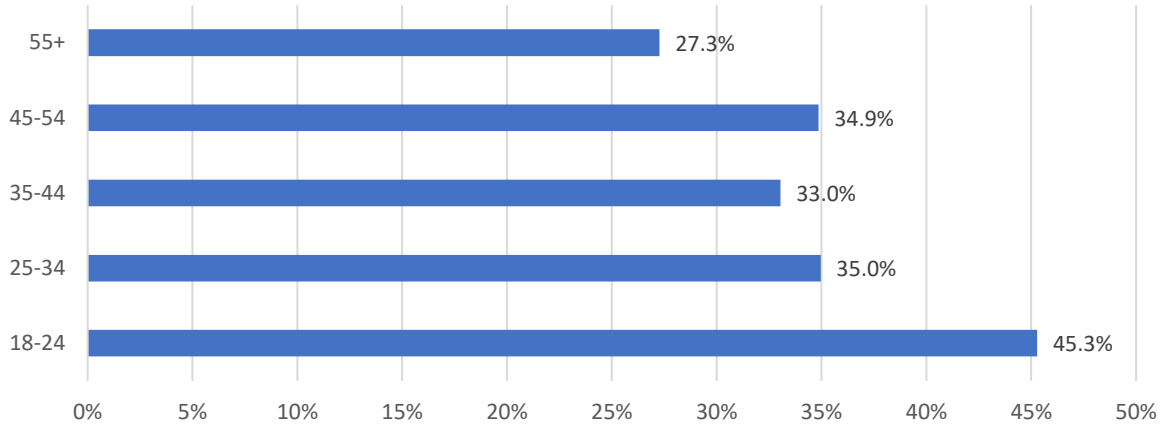
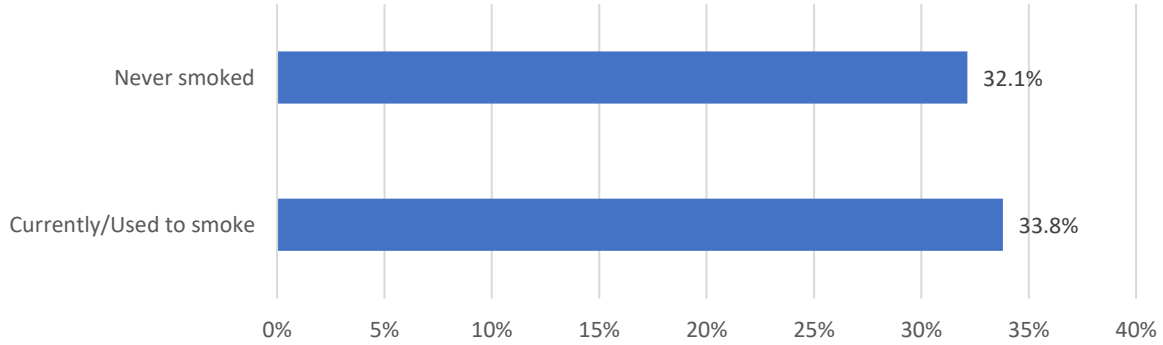


Chart 6. Percentage of respondents in Spain who agree with the statement they have less sympathy for people with lung cancer than for other types of cancer, by smoking status



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]

Public support for lung cancer screening is very strong in Spain, with 86.2% of respondents agreeing that there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early. Spain ranks among the strongest supporters of screening across all countries surveyed.

Spain does not yet have a national lung cancer screening programme. However, important steps are underway through pilot projects and research networks.[3] These findings support the case for

[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] European Lung Foundation (2025). Advancing lung cancer screening in Spain through research and collaboration. Available at: https://europeanlung.org/solace/2025/10/06/advancing-lung-cancer-screening-in-spain-through-research-and-collaboration/

progressing towards a national screening programme to support earlier diagnosis and improve outcomes for people with lung cancer.

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

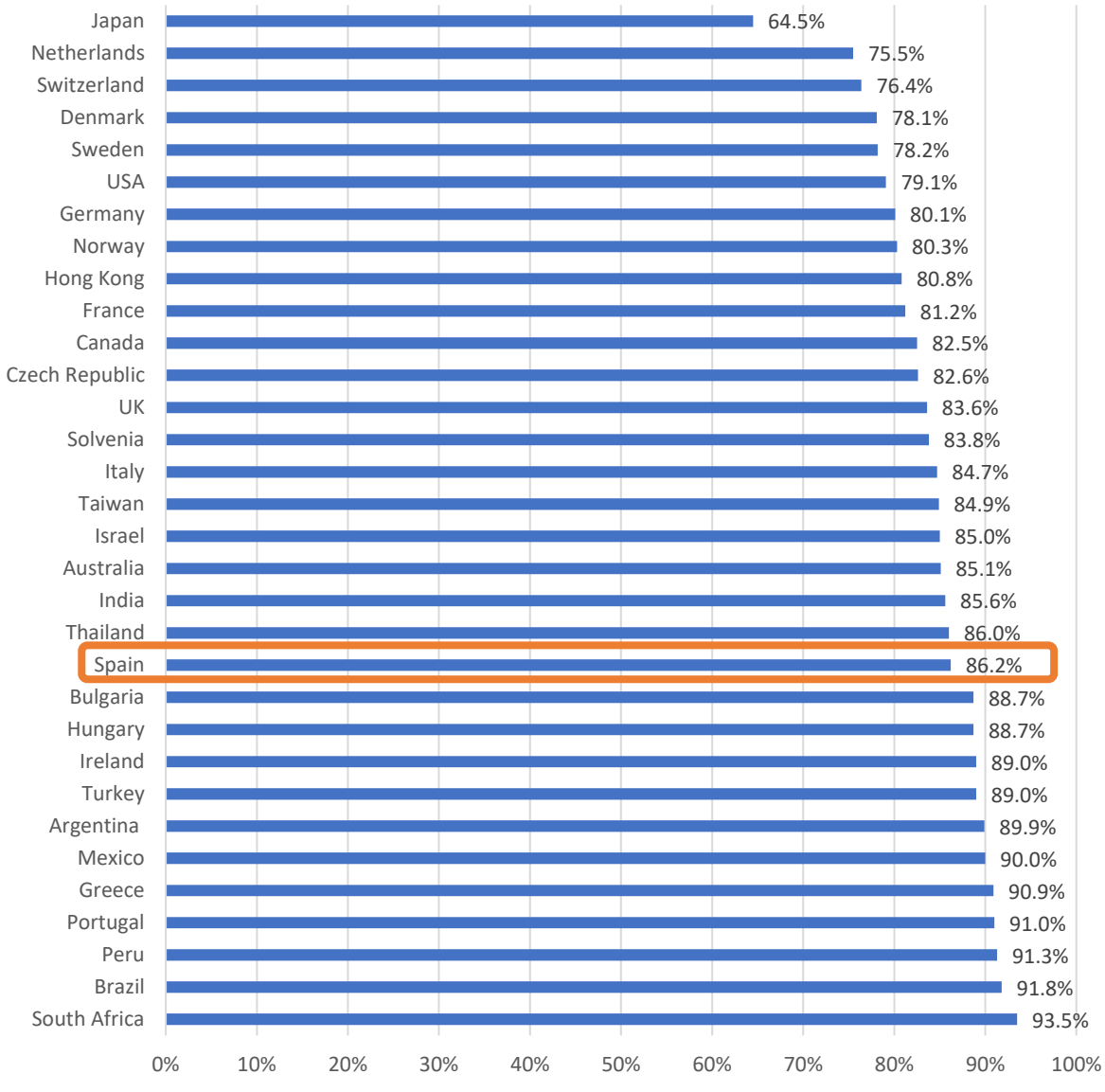


Chart 8. Percentage of respondents in Spain who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by age

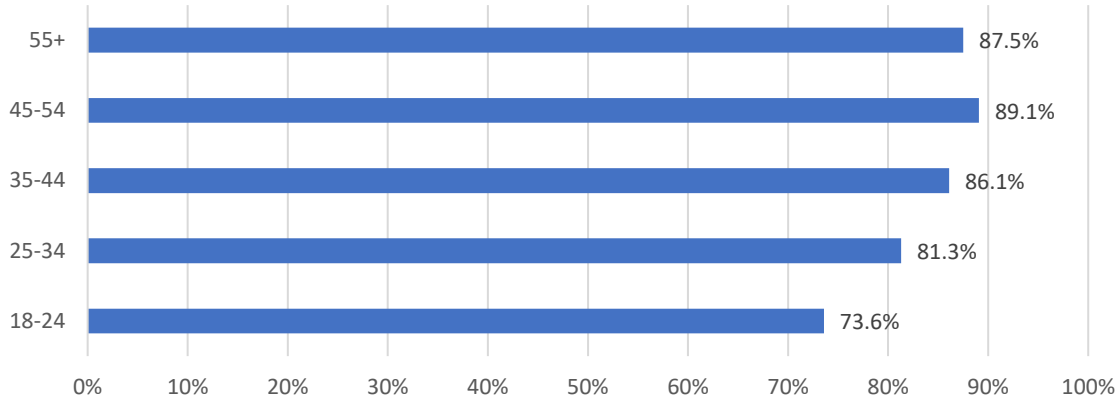
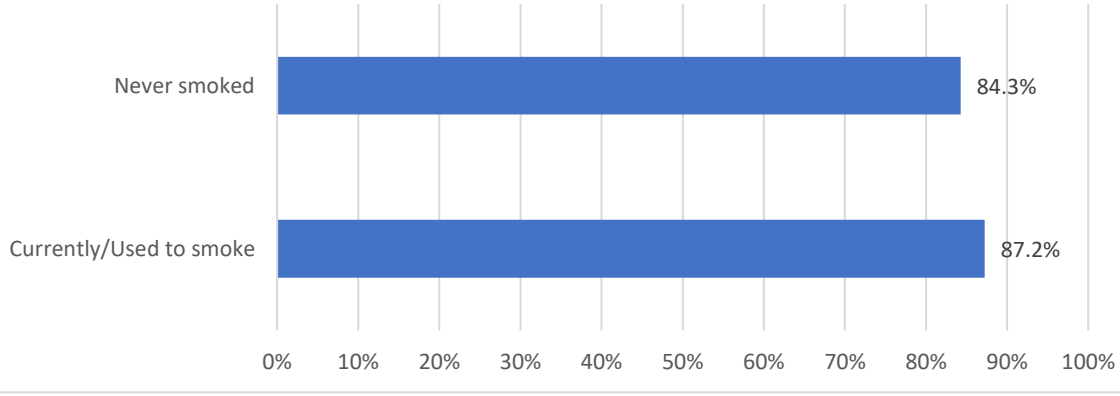


Chart 9. Percentage of respondents in Spain who agree there should be a national lung cancer screening programme to help people with lung cancer get diagnosed early, by smoking status



Conclusion

The 2026 findings highlight both challenges and opportunities for improving lung cancer outcomes in Spain. Public awareness of lung cancer symptoms remains low, with Spain recording the highest proportion of people unable to identify any symptoms among the countries surveyed. At the same time, stigma towards people with lung cancer still persists, despite the fact that levels of lung cancer stigma were found to be lower overall than in many other countries surveyed.

Public support for lung cancer screening is exceptionally strong, with almost nine in ten people supporting a national screening programme. This suggests there is a strong foundation to support efforts to implement such programmes, and thus improve earlier diagnosis and outcomes.

These findings reinforce the need for increased public awareness activity, continued efforts to challenge stigma and misconceptions, and action to support earlier diagnosis of lung cancer. The GLCC will use these findings to support advocacy and awareness activities aimed at improving outcomes for everyone affected by lung cancer in Spain.

GLOBAL LUNG CANCER COALITION

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.