



ATTITUDES OF UKRAINIANS TOWARD NUCLEAR ENERGY

Results of All-Ukrainian Social Survey: Summary

Kyiv 2015



National
Ecological
Centre of
Ukraine





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Attitudes of Ukrainians toward Nuclear Energy. Results of All-Ukrainian Social Survey: Summary

This survey was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology within the common project of the Office of Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine and the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine on study of the attitudes of Ukrainians toward energy saving, energy efficiency and nuclear energy. The sole responsibility of the content of this document lies with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Office of Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine.

SUMMARY: MAIN RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

An All-Ukrainian survey on opinions and attitudes of the population of Ukraine regarding nuclear energy was held by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in June – August of 2015 on request by the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine and Friedrich Ebert Foundation Office in Ukraine.

1. Results of focus group discussions¹

Most of participants had doubts regarding evaluation of safety of the nuclear energy sector, minority split into firm supporters and adversaries of sector's development.

«From an environmental point of view, if a [nuclear] plant is made well, it brings less harm than any thermal one», Kyiv

«Cost of a kWh is the cheapest there. This is really so », Zaporizhia

«No, people, without nuclear plants it'll all be up with us. Yet, yet I mean. As long as we won't come up with anything smarter », Zaporizhia

«That nuclear plant is not that scary if it follows a normal regime», Zdolbuniv

«If it's needed then it's needed. Because we cannot do anymore without electricity. We've got used to civilisation. If the lights are turned off for 3 hours, we already feel very uneasy», Novogrygorivka

«Environment pollution, possibility of a disaster.. These, I think, are the most crucial [negative sides]», Zaporizhia

Convinced and hesitating supporters think that discussed national nuclear energy policy steps (e.g., life-span extension of nuclear power units, construction of new units) are possible only under the condition that the strictest nuclear safety requirements are maintained in the view of possible environmental impacts.

«Every plant has to undergo a planned inspection. And then decisions have to be made for every plant separately», Novogrygorivka

Convinced adversaries were stressing that corruption and social crisis are making it impossible to adhere to this condition. Some adversaries deemed that alternative energy solutions have to be developed without any hesitation, instead of planning and relying in the future on nuclear energy.

«Nuclear energy is, in my opinion, is a remnant of the past already», Zaporizhia

«Most likely, we should be looking for some alternatives», Zdolbuniv

«We should abandon these nuclear plants. I've been, for example, not a long time ago to Europe, and there the wind turbines are standing everywhere. [...] First of all,

¹ Focus-group discussions, as the first stage of an overall survey, were held in 4 locations of different size: Kyiv city, Zaporizhia city, Zdolbuniv city (Rivne oblast) and Novogrygorivka village (Mykolaiv oblast).

they are safe. And second of all, from the money perspective, the cost is almost the same», Zaporizhia

Among all the nuclear energy sector stakeholders participants expressed the biggest trust to scientists, field experts, international organisations. Somewhat less trust and hypothetically (as not many were known) to civil society figures (activists, ecologists, experts in the field). The least trust was expressed toward state institutions and representatives in nuclear energy sector. The participants appeared to mostly distrust related information that they receive from various media resources.

«Because the media is not writing anything that would interest me», Zdolbuniv

«You are asking about such things, which are absolutely confidential. And no information on operation of nuclear plants you won't get from anywhere and no one. Only from friends, relatives or acquaintances. But not on emissions, technical condition or operation», Zaporizhia

«We don't believe because we are determining it b [own]y headaches», Novogrygorivka

«We are not experts in the field, so we don't know anything», Zdolbuniv

The participants also noted that it's unlikely that opinion of the citizens can influence respective government decisions on development of nuclear sector.

«Basically, nothing depends on us, supporting we it or we're against it, we're not the ones who are to take decisions», Zaporizhia

Opinions on dealing with consequences of Chernobyl disaster were ambivalent. Pessimistic views somewhat prevailed. They were mostly built upon the following ideas on disaster consequences: long-term influence on gene pool, health, environment. Other views included assumptions or evidences about improved conditions in the exclusion zone: "nature's revival", "people are living there" (Kyiv).

«In comparison to the current state of environment in the city, Chernobyl is not that scary», Kyiv

«Chernobyl is a threat at a genetic level. A person can be living absolutely normally, but then the children will be born as freaks. In 2-3 generation. As far as I understand, teh situation cannot improve. I have a contact in the society of disabled children, and it is a nightmare what's going on!», Kyiv

«What's left if the contaminated air, the diseases. Probably years, or a century is needed for it to clean up. And impact on health is probably still there», Zaporizhia

«Look what's going on with our health. Everyone has problems with bones, oncological issues increase from a year to year. All this is long-lasting [effect of] stronium, caesium», Zdolbuniv

« Everyone had enough of Chernobyl... - [number of] Heritable diseases increased. And overall, diseases and death-rate», Novogrygorivka

Some participants also marked out that consequences of Chernobyl at the moment are clouded by more pressing challenges, such as the economic crisis, military conflict, ecological state of the city (Kyiv) etc.

2. Social survey results

- **Almost half of Ukrainians (42%) do not know what is a share of electricity produced at nuclear power plants.** Quarter of the population (26%) is overestimating the role of NPPs (thinking that they produce from 60 to 100% of electricity), 11% is underestimating the role. Approximately correct in their estimations were 21% of Ukrainians.
- Overall, an **absolute majority (83%) of Ukrainians consider nuclear an acceptable source of energy** (incl. 54% who absolutely support this), however, **only under the condition of adherence to strict safety requirements.** Only 8% do not support such a point of view
- Although the population in general considers nuclear energy acceptable under the strict safety requirements, nevertheless, **70% think that it is impossible to guarantee total safety at NPPs, and 71% disagree that nuclear energy practically does not have environmental impacts.**
- Some ambivalence can be observed also in respect to opinions regarding abandonment of the use of nuclear energy: on one hand, **65% of population think that there should be an immediate transition to alternative energy sources** (14% do not support this). On the other hand, 57% think that at the moment there are no acceptable alternatives to nuclear energy (22% disagree with this).
- Among those who agree that Ukraine has to immediately start transition toward alternative energy sources, **59% think that there are no acceptable alternatives at the moment** (while 26% agreed that such alternatives exist).
- **Full phase-out of nuclear energy is supported by “only” 38% of population**, 41% do not support it. At the same time, **54% hold on opinion that receiving cheap electricity from NPPs does not justify the risks** that stand behind the nuclear energy sector.
- 30% of Ukrainians simultaneously think that use of nuclear energy is not justified considering the risks and that there is a need to phase-out all the NPPs in the future.
- As far as an overall future of nuclear energy is concerned, **only 24% of population absolutely support gradual phase-out of all NPPs. The majority (60%) support keeping the use of nuclear energy**, incl. 31% who support development of the sector by building new nuclear units, or even new power plants.