

Millennials and Generation Z are more sustainability-orientated—even when it comes to money, researchers find

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Students at Hiroshima University using bicycles to commute to campus. A study by Hiroshima University researchers found that millennials and Gen Zs are more likely to value and practice sustainable behaviors. Credit: Hiroshima University

The younger generations are willing to put their money where their mouth is when it comes to sustainable living. In a study questioning both commitment to sustainable behaviors and willingness to trade better pay to work for a more sustainable-minded company, the surveyed young adults in Japan made their preferences clear.

The results were published in a special issue of the *Journal of Cleaner Production* focused on achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Researchers issued two surveys investigating how people support the SDGs, which consists of 17 goals and 169 targets to achieve by 2030—including ending poverty and ensuring access to clean water and sanitation for all.

"Many people, in popular media or even in daily conversation, say that the younger generation is more socially conscious and has sustainable development goal-orientated behavior, but [scientific evidence](#) is limited," said paper author Tomomi Yamane, researcher with the Network for Education and Research on Peace and Sustainability (NERPS) at Hiroshima University. "In this study, we provide novel evidence that the younger generation preferred a sustainable lifestyle than the [older generation](#). And [younger people](#) are willing to dispense income to work for SDG-minded companies."

The first survey had a nationwide adult sample of 12,098 across all adult generations in 2019 and 2020, and it found that those between the ages of 18 and 30 were far more likely to value and practice sustainable behaviors, such as paying more for sustainably developed products.

"In 2030, the younger generation will be the central working force in society and is expected to make real efforts to create a sustainable future and likely play a substantial role in achieving the SDGs," said paper co-author Shinji Kaneko, professor with NERPS at Hiroshima University.

"Corporations wanting to attract younger people to buy their products or services or to work for them should incorporate the SDGs into their strategies and seriously contribute to SDGs."

Seemingly contradictory to their overall interpretation, the researchers also found from the first survey that the [younger generations](#) are more concerned about finding a secure, well-paying job than older generations. However, the younger generation is more willing to be paid less to work for an SDG-minded [company](#), according to Yamane.

The second survey sampled 668 university students to understand the job preferences and how pay and company values may interact for the younger generation. The probability of a participant selecting the least SDG-minded company was about 28%, even if offered a high salary. The probability of selecting a highly SDG-minded company increased to 56%, even with the lowest pay. The probability of a participant electing to work at an SDG-minded company with high pay was 87%.

"Combined, the findings suggest that younger generations could change their behavior when they become knowledgeable about the inherent nature of SDGs, despite the findings from the first survey showing that the younger generation prefers better pay more than older generations," Yamane said. "Our findings suggest that today's younger [generation](#) can be the driving force for achieving the SDGs."

Next, the researchers will conduct a more comprehensive survey that also assess job-related activities and attitudes in relation to SDG contributions and salaries.

More information: Tomomi Yamane et al. Is the younger generation a driving force toward achieving the sustainable development goals? Survey experiments, *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.125932](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.125932)

Provided by Hiroshima University

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