

# Women favor climate actions that benefit future generations more than men, research shows

March 14 2024, by Hanna Bäck and Emma A. Renström (prev. Bäck)

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Credit: AI-generated image

The decisions we make now inevitably shape the prospects for generations to come. So tackling a long-term problem like climate change raises an intergenerational moral dilemma: should we invest in solutions that might not personally benefit ourselves but will help future

generations reach net zero—or should money be spent to ensure everyone right now has the best possible quality of life?

Some of these choices people make may depend on gender. Women are more likely than men to be more concerned for the well-being of [future generations](#) and more likely to bear the costs of costly climate mitigation policies. New [research](#) into this intergenerational altruism examines the attitudes and behaviors of 1,600 Swedish citizens, and has found a significant difference between women and men.

Women tend to make more climate-friendly choices than men, according to [previous research](#). A [study based on Gallup polls](#) involving more than 6,000 US citizens found that women are more worried than men about health-related environmental problems. However, previous research had little to say about whether women deal with environmental intergenerational dilemmas differently than men.

Curious about whether women are more likely to favor costly environmental actions that benefit future generations, our team, including the researchers Gustav Agneman and Sofia Henriks, asked participants to state how many children they have or would like to have. Then they were told how many descendants they could have in 250 years and asked to distribute imaginary resources across generations.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on the fact that if we use up all resources today, there will be none left for future generations. Finally, they were asked whether they'd support climate policies that would increase the costs of aviation, food, fuel and clothes.

A control group of participants were simply asked about their attitudes toward these costly climate policies without being told their estimated number of descendants or how they might distribute resources. Support for climate policies was compared across these two groups.

Results show clear gender differences. Women were more supportive of costly climate mitigation policies when they had been informed about their projected number of descendants and had distributed resources across generations. Men were not more likely to support costly climate mitigation [policy](#) when asked to contemplate future generations.

Women expressed more worries about the impact of [climate change](#), indicating that when women reflect on their future generations, they become more concerned about climate change and its impact on the planet, and more willing to invest in climate solutions now.

A [large body](#) of [social psychology research](#) on [gender stereotypes](#) shows that women are seen, and see themselves, as more caring and nurturing than men. The [gender differences](#) found in our study could be explained by nurturing traits being activated more significantly in women than men when reflecting on the climate risks that their descendants might face.

## **Future implications**

Some citizens seem willing to bear the costs of climate mitigation policies to benefit future generations. Our study suggests that making people aware of the consequences of their behavior and helping them to psychologically connect to future generations may lead them to be more willing to make environmentally friendly choices. This suggests that [political campaigns](#) that stress environmental consequences are not futile.

Women are not necessarily the only people likely to respond to such calls for intergenerational altruism in the future. Gender stereotypes are changing in society. [Previous research](#) has [indicated](#) that changes in the workforce [influence](#) how men and women are perceived and socialized. If boys are encouraged from an [early age to be more caring of others](#), traits traditionally associated with femininity could become more

widespread among men.

Perhaps then more men might favor environmental actions that benefit future generations. Until then, women's voices in the climate mitigation debate should clearly be listened to.

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