

## Want to fight climate change? Have fewer children

**Damian Carrington – The Guardian - 12 Jul 2017**

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/12/want-to-fight-climate-change-have-fewer-children>

The greatest impact individuals can have in fighting climate change is to have one fewer child, according to a new study that identifies the most effective ways people can cut their carbon emissions.

The next best actions are selling your car, avoiding long flights, and eating a vegetarian diet. These reduce emissions many times more than common green activities, such as recycling, using low energy light bulbs or drying washing on a line. However, the high impact actions are rarely mentioned in government advice and school textbooks, researchers found. [...]

The new study, published in Environmental Research Letters, sets out the impact of different actions on a comparable basis. By far the biggest ultimate impact is having one fewer child, which the researchers calculated equated to a reduction of 58 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> for each year of a parent's life. [...]

Overpopulation has been a controversial factor in the climate change debate, with some pointing out that an American is responsible for 40 times the emissions produced by a Bangladeshi and that overconsumption is the crucial issue. The new research comes a day after researchers blamed overpopulation and overconsumption on the "biological annihilation" of wildlife which has started a mass extinction of species on the planet.

[...] "It is not a sacrifice message," she said. "It is trying to find ways to live a good life in a way that leaves a good atmosphere for the planet. I've found it really positive to make many of these changes."

The researchers analysed dozens of sources from Europe, North America and Japan to calculate the carbon savings individuals in richer nations can make. They found getting rid of a car saved 2.4 tonnes a year, avoiding a return transatlantic flight saved 1.6 tonnes and becoming vegetarian saved 0.8 tonnes a year. [...]

The researchers found that government advice in the US, Canada, EU and Australia rarely mentioned the high impact actions, with only the EU citing eating less meat and only Australia citing living without a car. None mentioned having one fewer child. In an analysis of school textbooks on Canada only 4% of the recommendations were high impact.

Chris Goodall, an author on low carbon living and energy, said: "The paper usefully reminds us what matters in the fight against global warming. But in some ways it will just reinforce the suspicion of the political right that the threat of climate change is simply a cover for reducing people's freedom to live as they want.

"Population reduction would probably reduce carbon emissions but we have many other tools for getting global warming under control," he said. "Perhaps more importantly, cutting the number of people on the planet will take hundreds of years. Emissions reduction needs to start now."