

# Harsh Reality of Double-Edged Digital Era

*"Digital was supposed to release each and every one of us from the daily grind of work carrying with it increased leisure all round. The reality is somewhat different."*

The Digital Age is often described as a highly-sophisticated time in terms of unrivalled communications, connecting, opportunities and increased leisure time. To learn increasing numbers of Scottish pensioners are working well into their eighties when they should instead be enjoying the fruits of decades of work is, well, worrying.

Aged folks belong to a section of the population growing in numbers far faster than all other age groups. They rightly must feel short-changed as they attempt to make ends meet and survive what, for them, remains a permanent cost-of-living crisis representing a wider malaise where a key section of society is made to feel second-class citizens.



Retirement consultants describe situation as an octogenarian conundrum

## Riots in the Streets

It is as much a socio-economic problem along with big business corporate responsibility shortfalls plus attitudes and actions of some well-heeled politicians who should know better.

In France a decision to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 led to street riots and close attention of the country's judiciary at the highest levels.

Finland is reported to be the best place for pensioners, followed by Poland and Sweden the latter boasting an impressive 100 per cent rate of participation in funded pensions.

The website PensionBee has described the UK state pension as "modest" adding many retirees are struggling to live comfortably. To make matters worse that pension pot a person finally finishes up with is up for grabs.

In 2021 4.6 million cases of fraud, mostly online, were reported a fair chunk involving pension scams and the figure continues to rise as cybercriminals envisage rich pickings from unwitting elderly folk.

The 2010 Equality Act includes Scotland and has nine basic points one of which is age, with legal protection from discrimination in the workplace and wider society, replacing previous anti-discrimination laws.

A single act supposed to make the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. Yet there are genuine fears it doesn't go far enough. *Science Daily* noted ageism is nowadays considered to be the most common form of prejudice involving those aged 60 and over.

In a study involving researchers around the world a common response added up to a lack of a comprehensive scrutiny at the problem and this despite widespread fallout from systematic ageism that is both blatant and subtle.

"We can't have a quarter of our population being harmed and we can't lose out on all the enormous benefits that older people can bring to society," the report concludes.

## **Elder Millennials**

The Centre for Ageing Better cited a report of such UK-wide damaging views encapsulated in the language used, to the point where it risks damaging the social fabric by stoking intergenerational tension through negative attitudes like "boomer vs millennial" as if it's a competition.

*Insider's* tech commentator Emilia David, who describes herself as an "elder millennial" living in one of the most expensive cities in the world, often worries about money and isn't alone in feeling uncertain about finances.

She points to how millennials (age range 27-42) and Gen Z (range upwards into their mid-twenties) have each found themselves financially scarred by the pandemic and getting stuck in a cycle of spending, saving and debt.

Another drawback is the way later life (Gen X are categorised as aged between 43-58, and boomers 59-68) is spoken about in politics, to the point where it potentially affects policymaking. It is not solely politicians.



Digital Clock is Ticking

The centre also points to failures involving the media, advertising even the charity sector all reinforcing prejudices. "Political discourse mainly frames the ageing population as a costly 'crisis' emphasising the dependence of older people on state support".

This overlooks the vital contribution of people at older ages to society. Including caring for loved ones and providing support in communities through the reality and diversity of later life.

Far too often they become affected by stereotypes leading to harassment and discrimination, types of attitudes often expressed as *isms* we all know so well like ageism, sexism and racism.

### **A Waste of Skills**

Interestingly, under the act an "equality and diversity" policy involves a written agreement for a group in whatever sector or community. All about how it must avoid discrimination against people together with creating a safe and inclusive atmosphere for both members and service users.

One report reveals workers who take early retirement form the largest number of individuals classed as economically inactive, it is claimed, deprive companies of badly-needed skills

My sociology professor told me decades ago to prepare for the leisure society. I guess he hadn't factored in how skewed workplace demands have become. The Trussell Trust warns there are far too many cases where, due to a profound lack of hard cash and support, to put it bluntly a person is expected to work 'til they drop.

We're living In highly volatile post-pandemic highly economic times, food banks and increasing numbers admitting to eating only once daily. It's clear no smart digital gadget, like a more expensive mobile phone or a social media-driven autonomous (ro)bot computer program, looks likely to change this sorry situation anytime soon...