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Meet Your Colleague

# Generational diversity from an intersectional point of view

Italy  
LABC

Patterns of Voice, Victimhood and Support



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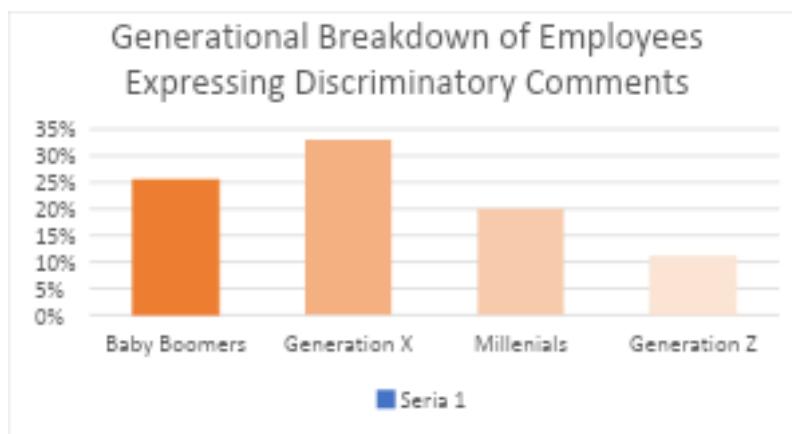
## Patterns of Voice, Victimhood and Support

### Introduction

Discrimination in the workplace cannot be understood through age alone. While generational identity shapes who expresses bias, who experiences it and who steps in to provide support, other factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic background intersect to create layered patterns of exclusion. Recognising these intersections is essential to grasp the full complexity of workplace inequalities.

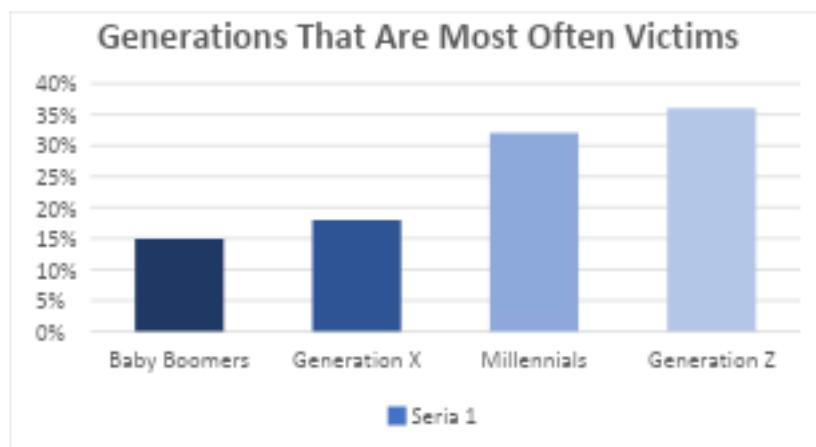
### Content

The expression of discriminatory comments in the workplace is a significant concern. Data from the MYCo survey reveal that older generations, particularly Baby Boomers and Generation X, are more frequently reported to express discriminatory remarks. This trend may be attributed to fixed cultural norms and a lack of awareness regarding contemporary issues of diversity and inclusion. Conversely, younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, report experiencing these comments more frequently, highlighting a potential generational divide in both the perpetration and victimisation of discriminatory behaviours.



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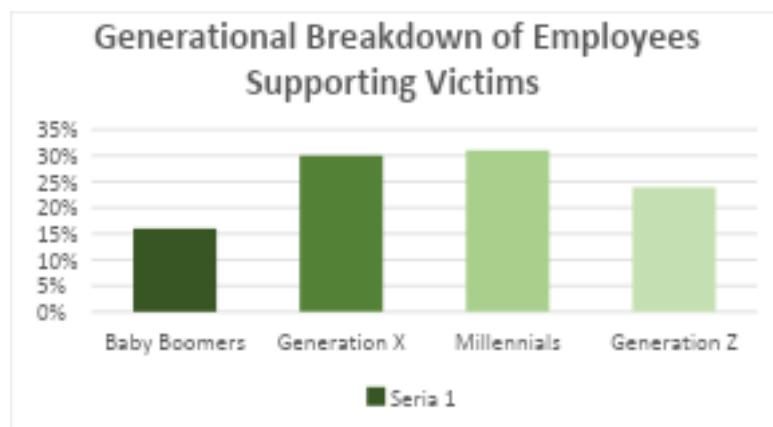
The experience of being subjected to discriminatory comments can have profound effects on employees. Younger generations, especially Millennials and Generation Z, report higher instances of victimisation. This increased exposure can lead to feelings of alienation, decreased job satisfaction, and heightened stress levels. The intersectionality of age with other identity factors, such as gender and ethnicity, further exacerbates these effects, leading to compounded disadvantages for certain individuals.



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Victimisation in the workplace often affects younger employees, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, such as Millennials and Generation Z. This heightened exposure can arise from several interrelated factors. First, hierarchical positioning plays a role: entry- and mid-level employees are frequently more vulnerable to critical or exclusionary remarks from senior colleagues. Second, cultural mismatches between generations – differences in communication styles, expectations, or workplace values – can create friction that sometimes manifests as subtle or overt discriminatory behaviour. Finally, age rarely acts alone; it intersects with other identity factors, including gender, ethnicity, or disability, amplifying the likelihood of marginalisation. For example, a young woman of colour may face compounded challenges tied to both age and gender, layered further with racialised assumptions, making her experience of exclusion particularly acute. These patterns illustrate that workplace victimisation is shaped not just by age, but by the complex interplay of multiple social identities within organisational structures.

Support for colleagues who experience discriminatory comments plays a crucial role in shaping whether workplaces feel inclusive and safe. Younger employees, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, are often at the forefront of such efforts. Their willingness to step in, challenge inappropriate behaviour, and affirm the dignity of others reflects a broader generational shift toward inclusivity and fairness. Yet, while these gestures of solidarity are significant, their impact is not always equal. Employees in junior roles may offer moral support, but their ability to alter outcomes is limited when organisational hierarchies place authority in the hands of older, more senior staff. By contrast, when colleagues with formal power (often from older generations) intervene on behalf of victims, their actions can carry greater weight, changing norms and signalling that discrimination will not be tolerated. This imbalance reveals an important dynamic: while the will to support may be strongest among younger generations, the ability to effect real change depends heavily on positional authority and organisational structures.



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Although age is a highly visible factor in workplace discrimination, it rarely stands alone. Other dimensions – such as gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic background – frequently compound the experience of exclusion. Women across generations, for example, often face gendered barriers that intersect with age-related stereotypes, producing additional hurdles to recognition and advancement. Similarly, employees from minority ethnic backgrounds may encounter prejudices that intensify when combined with perceptions tied to youth or seniority. For those with disabilities, expectations around adaptability or productivity can create further disadvantage, especially when layered onto generational assumptions. Even socio-economic status shapes opportunity: access to education, resources and networks often interacts with age to determine who is seen as credible or deserving of advancement.

Taken together, these intersecting factors reveal that discrimination is not the product of a single identity marker but the outcome of multiple, overlapping characteristics that create unique patterns of vulnerability. Younger workers tend to report the highest levels of victimisation, reflecting both their positioning within organisational hierarchies and the way age interacts with other marginalised identities. At the same time, older generations are more often associated with the expression of discriminatory behaviours, a pattern that may be linked to long-established cultural norms and the concentration of authority in senior roles. Support for victims is most frequently demonstrated by younger employees, suggesting a generational shift toward allyship, though their ability to influence outcomes remains constrained by their position in the hierarchy.

These dynamics make clear that age cannot be analysed in isolation. It shapes the likelihood of expressing, experiencing, or challenging discrimination, but it does so in concert with other social factors. Understanding the full picture requires an intersectional perspective – one that recognises how gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic status interact with generational identity to create complex, multi-layered vulnerabilities in the workplace.



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Recognising these patterns is essential for interpreting workplace dynamics accurately. It emphasises that generational diversity brings not only differences in work styles and values but also complex interactions with social inequalities. A nuanced understanding of these dynamics is crucial for fostering truly inclusive and equitable work environments, ensuring that all employees, regardless of age or other identity factors, are acknowledged, respected and supported.



## Generational Cards



### Generational diversity from an intersectional point of view Patterns of Voice, Victimhood and Support Generation: Gen Z

#### The Stereotype

Often dismissed as “too sensitive,” they are assumed unable to handle workplace challenges. Their concerns may be minimised or overlooked, perceived as a sign of immaturity or insufficient resilience.

#### Research Findings

They experience some of the highest rates of victimisation. Intersectional factors – such as age, ethnicity and disability – further increase vulnerability, contributing to structural exclusion within team dynamics.

#### Strategies and Practical Advice

Introduce mentoring programs, safe reporting channels and awareness initiatives. Validate experiences, address systemic barriers and provide Gen Z with the tools to navigate workplace challenges with confidence.





## Generational diversity from an intersectional point of view

### Patterns of Voice, Victimhood and Support

Generation: **Millenials**

#### The Stereotype

Often perceived as entitled or quick to raise complaints about unfairness, their advocacy for equitable treatment may be misinterpreted as overreaction rather than a legitimate concern.

#### Research Findings

They are frequently victims, facing disadvantages related to disability, mental health and socio-economic status. These patterns highlight systemic inequities that shape their career trajectories.

#### Strategies and Practical Advice

Enhance institutional protections, normalise conversations about mental health and establish transparent advancement pathways to reduce vulnerabilities and promote fairness.





## Generational diversity from an intersectional point of view

### Patterns of Voice, Victimhood and Support

Generation: Gen X

#### The Stereotype

Perceived as the “invisible middle,” they are often overlooked in discussions of workplace equity. While assumed resilient because of their age, their challenges frequently remain underrecognised.

#### Research Findings

They experience moderate victimisation, primarily related to religion and disability. Intersectional factors affect mid-career professionals, though these experiences are often underreported.

#### Strategies and Practical Advice

Engage Gen X in equity programs, evaluate intersectional barriers and incorporate their perspectives into policy discussions to ensure mid-level employees are supported and acknowledged.





## Generational diversity from an intersectional point of view

### Patterns of Voice, Victimhood and Support

Generation: Babyboomers

#### The Stereotype

Perceived as resilient and senior, they are often assumed to be immune to discrimination due to their experience and authority. Age is seen as conferring protection against exclusion.

#### Research Findings

They are less frequently victims overall, but disability, health and age-related factors can limit participation. These barriers intersect with digital accessibility and changing workplace expectations.

#### Strategies and Practical Advice

Prioritise accessibility, digital inclusion and recognition initiatives. Highlight older employees' contributions within diversity agendas to ensure inclusion at every career stage.





## Key takeaways

- **Intersectionality** reminds us that people are never defined by age alone; other identities (gender, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic background, religion, appearance) overlap with generational identity to shape how they are treated.
- If organisations only look at age differences without considering intersectionality, they risk reinforcing hidden biases and leaving already marginalised groups even more excluded.
- **Intersectional discrimination** happens when age-related biases combine with other forms of prejudice, creating unique disadvantages (e.g., a young woman of colour being labelled both “inexperienced” and “too assertive”).
- Power is unevenly distributed: **Older generations** often hold formal organisational power (seniority, decision-making authority, established networks). **Younger generations** may hold cultural or social influence (digital fluency, progressive values, focus on social justice) but lack structural authority.
- Different generations perceive intersectional bias differently: **Gen Z** – especially alert to ethnicity, disability, and mental health issues. **Millennials** – highlight stress, workload and subtle barriers in promotions and evaluations. **Gen X** – recognise religious and disability-based exclusion from a mid-career perspective.  
**Baby Boomers:** report less discrimination overall due to seniority, but disability remains a significant barrier.
- **Disability & Mental Health:** Younger workers may face accessibility issues in digital tools, while older workers may be doubted for adaptability. Mental health challenges intersect with age, affecting visibility and career growth.
- **Ethnicity/Nationality:** Minority employees face compounded bias – a young ethnic minority worker may be excluded as “inexperienced,” while an older minority colleague may face both racism and ageism.
- **Gender:** Women often experience layered stereotypes – e.g., younger women seen as too inexperienced or overly ambitious; older women sidelined as “past their peak.”
- **Religion:** Religious identity may clash with generational expectations about work ethic, availability, or cultural fit.
- **Socio-economic Class:** Lower-income backgrounds limit access to networks, digital fluency, or costly credentials, compounding generational stereotypes of competence.
- **Appearance/Physical Characteristics:** Older employees may be stereotyped as “less energetic,” while younger ones may be dismissed as “not serious enough.”
- **Awareness building:** Structured dialogue (workshops, storytelling, cross-generational exchanges) helps employees see beyond their personal lens and recognise discrimination as multi-layered.
- **Safe reporting structures:** Anonymous platforms, mediators, and confidential lines reduce fear of retaliation — crucial for junior staff and older employees worried about reputational harm.



- **Allyship & mentorship:** Intentional cross-generational mentoring (e.g., a Boomer using authority to back a Gen Z initiative, or a Millennial coaching on career navigation) strengthens solidarity and bridges gaps.
- **Bias-aware systems:** Embedding anti-bias training into hiring, promotions and evaluations reduces reliance on stereotypes about age or identity.
- **Policy & accountability:** Policies must explicitly address intersectionality and be enforced through leadership modelling, rewards for inclusive behaviour and performance metrics tied to equity goals.
- Generational diversity becomes a strength only when organisations embed intersectional equity into culture, policies and everyday practices.

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