

Integrating GEDSI into Financial Inclusion: Cheat Sheets for Financial Service Providers

Embedding Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) in the finance sector is not a one-off initiative. It is a gradual and strategic transformation that requires financial service providers (FSPs) to rethink how they understand customers, design services, and measure success.

GEDSI recognises that financial exclusion is shaped by overlapping and intersecting identities such as gender, disability, age, income, location, and citizenship status. For FSPs, meaningful inclusion begins with a fundamental shift in perspective and evolves through a clear and structured transformation pathway.

A. Start with a Fundamental Question

Before introducing new policies, products, or training, FSPs must first ask:
“Who are we serving and who are we missing?”

Answering this requires strengthening data systems to capture intersectional customer profiles, disaggregated across key dimensions:

Dimension	What to Capture
Gender	Inclusive and context-appropriate categories
Age	Life-stage groups (e.g. youth, working age, older persons)
Disability	Type, functional limitations, access barriers, caregiving responsibilities
Marital Status	Single, married, widowed, divorced
Citizenship / Displacement	Citizens, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs
Location	Urban, peri-urban, rural, remote, underserved areas
Income	Income level, stability, exposure to shocks
Smartphone Ownership	Access to digital tools and services
Social Protection	Access to national systems (e.g. BPJS in Indonesia)

An intersectional lens is essential, as exclusion rarely occurs along a single dimension. For example, an internally displaced woman with a disability may face compounded barriers that cannot be understood through gender or location alone.

B. Why Intersectional Data Is Foundational

Without robust, disaggregated data, FSPs risk designing products that appear inclusive but fail to reach those most excluded.

Strong intersectional data enables FSPs to:

- Identify underserved and excluded populations
- Understand the nature and intensity of barriers
- Track disparities in access, usage, and outcomes
- Develop credible GEDSI strategies, targets, and reporting

This transforms GEDSI from a conceptual commitment into evidence-based business decision-making.

C. What to Consider Across Key Dimensions

Effective use of data requires understanding how each dimension shapes financial access and exclusion:

- **Gender:** Identify disparities and eliminate unintended biases in product design and delivery. *(Approximately 700 million women remain excluded from financial services.)*
- **Age:** Address lifecycle barriers from youth exclusion and lack of financial history to digital literacy and accessibility challenges faced by older persons.
- **Disability:** Capture diverse forms of disability and identify functional barriers across physical, communication, and digital channels. *Globally, 1 in 6 people live with a disability, and women are disproportionately affected (around 1 in 5 women).*
- **Citizenship & Displacement:** Recognise documentation constraints faced by refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and citizens without national identity cards.
- **Location:** Address service delivery gaps in rural, remote, and underserved areas where infrastructure and outreach are limited.
- **Income:** Distinguish between structural exclusion and poverty-related barriers to better tailor financial products and risk assessments.
- **Digital Access:** Ensure digital financial services are accessible, affordable, and usable for all, including those with low connectivity, literacy, or assistive technology needs.
- **Smartphone Ownership:** Consider disparities in access to and control over mobile devices. Lack of smartphone ownership or reliance on shared devices, creates significant barriers to digital financial services. This particularly affects marginalised groups, especially women and persons with disabilities, limiting their privacy, autonomy, and ability to use mobile-based financial tools.
- **Postal Address:** Account for the lack of formal addressing systems - around 4 billion people globally do not have a reliable postal address, which creates barriers to KYC compliance, service delivery, and customer verification.
- **Social Protection:** Understand linkages with national social protection systems. In many rural areas, individuals lack civil documentation (e.g. national ID cards or marriage certificates), which restricts access to government services such as health insurance schemes (e.g. BPJS in Indonesia), despite being eligible.

D. How to Strengthen Data Collection

- Audit existing systems to identify gaps

- Use mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative)
- Engage excluded populations—not only existing customers
- Ensure ethical data practices, including consent, privacy, and “do no harm”

E. Embed GEDSI into Core Systems and Processes

To achieve sustainable impact, GEDSI must be integrated across all core functions:

- Customer onboarding and KYC
- Credit assessment and risk profiling
- Product design and delivery
- Digital financial services
- Client protection systems
- Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting
- Human resource policies and practices

GEDSI must become part of everyday operational and strategic decision-making.

F. The Challenge Is Not Technology

Digital financial inclusion is often framed as a technology issue. In practice:

The challenge is not technology. Digital systems fail when they are not designed for people.

The real barriers are human, not technological. Inclusive digital design must address behaviour, access, and trust simultaneously.

FSPs should focus on three interconnected dimensions:

- **Behaviour:**
Low digital literacy, particularly among rural women and other excluded groups, limits uptake and effective use
- **Access:**
Barriers include affordability, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and connectivity constraints
- **Trust:**
Fear of fraud, lack of confidence, usability challenges, and past negative experiences discourage engagement

Addressing only one dimension is insufficient. Inclusion requires integrated solutions that consider all three.

Implications for FSPs:

- Design user-centred and accessible digital platforms
- Provide digital and financial literacy support
- Strengthen consumer protection and fraud mitigation
- Offer alternative and assisted service channels

Next Step:

FSPs must identify practical solutions that ensure underserved populations, particularly persons with disabilities, can fully participate in the digital economy.

G. GEDSI Transformation Pathway in Financial Institutions

FSPs typically progress through the following stages:

1. **GEDSI-Blind** – No recognition of exclusion
2. **GEDSI Awareness** – Initial focus, often on gender
3. **Leadership Commitment**
 - a. GEDSI sponsor at leadership level
 - b. GEDSI focal points across teams
 - c. Inclusion embedded in strategy
4. **Foundational Integration**
 - a. Integration into HR systems and organisational culture
 - b. Inclusion in operational processes
5. **Consultation and Co-Creation**
 - a. Engagement with OPDs and community groups
 - b. Co-design of solutions based on lived experience
6. **Institutionalisation**
 - a. GEDSI embedded across policies, products, and systems
7. **Continuous Improvement**
 - a. Data-driven refinement and innovation

GEDSI evolves from awareness into a core business function.

H. Strengthen Leadership and Co-Creation

Institutional transformation requires:

- Strong leadership ownership
- Dedicated GEDSI roles and accountability
- Integration of lived experience perspectives

Ongoing engagement with OPDs and community stakeholders ensures services remain relevant and effective.

I. Institutionalise GEDSI Through Policy and ESG

Embedding GEDSI into policies and ESG frameworks enables FSPs to:

- Increase access for persons with disabilities using measurable data
- Strengthen the Social (S) pillar of ESG reporting
- Demonstrate inclusive practices to regulators and investors

This enhances accountability, transparency, and credibility, positioning FSPs as leaders in inclusive finance.

J. Recognise the Commercial Value of GEDSI

GEDSI integration delivers tangible business benefits:

- Improved customer insights and KYC processes
- Access to underserved and emerging markets
- Innovation in financial products and services
- Increased access to ESG-aligned funding
- Stronger customer trust and institutional reputation

GEDSI is both a social imperative and a strategic growth opportunity.

K. Commit to Continuous Improvement

GEDSI integration is not complete once systems are in place. FSPs must:

- Learn from data and client feedback
- Adapt to changing contexts
- Strengthen inclusive practices over time

Key Takeaway for Financial Service Providers

Inclusive finance begins with understanding who is excluded, and succeeds when GEDSI is embedded across every system, product, policy, and decision. Success lies in progressing along the GEDSI transformation pathway, from awareness to institutionalisation, while addressing real-world barriers of behaviour, access, and trust. This enables FSPs to deliver both meaningful financial inclusion, and sustainable business value,