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From Incentivizing to Enabling

A practitioner's guide to equitable climate action in cities

INCLU:DE - Socially just climate action in German cities

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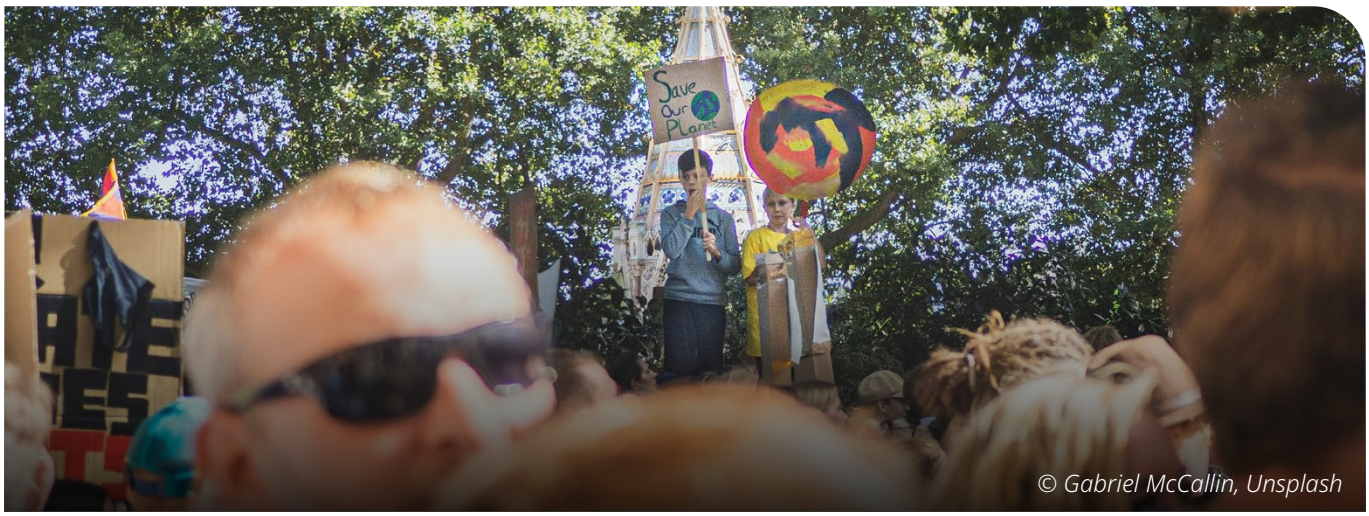

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About this Guidebook

In times of growing polarization around climate protection, a shared vision of the future and a sense of collective ownership over the transition are more important than ever. The window to effectively tackle climate change and adapt to its consequences is narrowing rapidly, making accelerated climate action at local and global levels essential. Yet the transition to a climate-neutral future will only be successful in the long-run if it is pursued equitably. Without fairness at its core, climate efforts risk deepening divides, undermining trust and promoting change fatigue.

Equity also redefines what climate action must look like. Building a truly sustainable future goes beyond cutting emissions. It means shaping solutions that reflect the lived realities of all communities, balancing ecological, economic and social goals. And it means enabling and empowering particularly the participation of underrepresented groups in the design of measures and decision-making processes (as well as in their subsequent implementation), to make sure climate action is truly inclusive and effective.

These efforts are at the core of the INCLU:DE - Just and inclusive climate action in German cities project implemented by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and supported by Stiftung Mercator. When we began this project with five German cities - Bonn, Dortmund, Essen, Heidelberg, and Ludwigsburg - in 2023, our shared ambition was clear: to support municipalities in embedding social justice more meaningfully into their local climate initiatives. From the outset, it was evident that this would require more than technical solutions, but also a shift in thinking, priorities, and practice.

Much of our work since then has focused on:

- **Building a shared understanding of equity and justice**, and applying these principles to the design of municipal climate strategies and programs;
- **Developing effective engagement and empowerment approaches** to ensure disadvantaged groups can actively shape and benefit from these programs; and
- **Strengthening the strategic alignment of equity and climate goals** across municipal departments and decision-making processes.

In this guidebook, we argue that local climate action will only be successful and sustainable if it enables and empowers all parts of society. But achieving this is no small task. Urban practitioners and policymakers face a complex mix of conceptual, structural, and institutional challenges. Many cities operate under tight financial constraints, limited staff capacity, and competing priorities. Even the most motivated individuals often find their efforts constrained by the broader system they work in.

One of our key reflections is that overcoming these barriers requires more than good intentions and committed individuals: it requires a clear political mandate. Without leadership that prioritizes equity as a fundamental part of climate policy, progress remains fragile and uneven. This guidebook shares insights, strategies, and examples from cities that are beginning to navigate this path - not because they have all the answers, but because they are willing to ask the right questions and push for systemic change.

For example, instead of mainly offering subsidies, some cities have supported local groups to teach their neighbors how to install and use balcony solar panels. This kind of community support helps people learn from each other, take ownership of climate goals, and often leads to more local climate action.

This guidebook is based on practical insights gained from local implementation throughout the INCLU:DE project. It aims to support all stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of local climate action by offering concrete recommendations, best practices, and practical tools to overcome three key challenges:

COMMUNITY INCLUSION CHALLENGES

Understanding target group needs through effective outreach & engagement

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

Developing a shared understanding of equity & embedding it into the design of climate measures

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Strategically driving socially just climate action within the municipality

We invite readers to reflect on these themes, actively engage with the content of this guidebook, and join us in advancing more inclusive climate action in cities and regions across the globe.

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A BRIEF REFLECTION ON LANGUAGE USED IN THIS GUIDEBOOK


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Social equity and justice are two sides of the same coin. Justice is a means of upholding inalienable rights and societal norms for all individuals, and social equity in climate action means providing individuals with resources and tools according to their needs, removing systemic barriers that keep inequalities in place, and transforming structures and contexts so they can sustain equal opportunities, access, and participation for everyone.

This guidebook recognizes that people start from different places in life and have diverse needs that ought to be addressed in order to achieve equal outcomes (e.g. a safe, happy, and healthy life and access to opportunities). Therefore, we must reconsider the experiences and the systems to ensure equitability is the end result.

Throughout this publication, readers will note that we have made conscious effort to avoid phrases that recreate inequalities. For example, expressions like 'marginalized communities' or 'vulnerable groups' can unintentionally depersonalize people and imply a personal weakness, when in fact it is systemic policies and structures that create vulnerability by limiting access to resources, opportunities, and basic rights. Phrases like 'communities marginalized by the system' or 'disadvantaged communities' more clearly shift the focus to structural causes of inequalities.[1]

In our consideration of disadvantage and vulnerability, we acknowledge that the insights and examples presented in this publication are rooted primarily in urban contexts from Germany, as well as selected cases from Europe, the United States, and East Asia. As such, our understanding of equity is shaped by the specific socio-economic, political, and environmental conditions of these regions. We recognize that this lens may not capture the full scale or nature of disadvantage experienced in other parts of the world, where entire countries or regions may face systemic challenges far beyond the urban scope we address here. Nevertheless, because our focus is on cities and urban governance, we hope that the reflections and lessons shared in this work can offer valuable guidance and inspiration for cities globally, even as they adapt these ideas to their own distinct contexts.

1 For more information, please see Alliance for Healthier Communities (2021): Inclusive and Empathetic Language Use Guidelines.


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Introduction

i. How equity-blind mitigation efforts increase existing inequalities

The impacts of climate change are not experienced equally. While all communities face risks such as heatwaves or heavy rainfall, those most affected by the social and economic consequences are often already facing systemic disadvantage. At the same time, within the climate transition, we have seen how climate mitigation efforts focused on individual consumption and mobility, such as targeted support for home energy upgrades, electric vehicles, and rooftop solar, tend to **disproportionately benefit wealthier households more**. These groups are more likely to own properties, have the financial means to invest in new technologies, and access the information and networks needed to take advantage of public programs. Similarly, investments in green and cycling infrastructure are often concentrated in neighborhoods where more affluent populations live, leading to **unequal access** to these public goods.

When climate funds are distributed without considering these structural inequalities, the **widening of the social gap** becomes an inevitable, unintended consequence. In other words, public money will flow towards those already better off, while groups with limited economic means remain more exposed to both the impacts of climate change and the burden of transition.

This is why climate policies must be **intentionally designed** to include those who are too often left behind.

ii. How equity can be integrated into climate action

When we take a closer look at who is being left behind in current climate protection efforts and emerging technologies accessibility, certain patterns start to emerge.

Low-income households and **residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods** frequently face significant **barriers** to participating in climate action owing to factors like limited capital, lack of home ownership, or lower levels of trust in public institutions. This

means, they often lack the means for upfront investments in energy-efficient upgrades or clean technologies, and as **tenants**, they also have **limited control** over desired changes to their homes. Other **structural factors**, such as education levels and language barriers may limit their ability to apply for such climate measures, or oftentimes translate into a lack of awareness about the existence of many opportunities.

Furthermore, residents of **structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods** typically face lower levels of public and private investment in infrastructure. **Some families**, especially **single-parent households**, are at higher risk of experiencing poverty, while **older adults** and **people with disabilities or limited mobility** may encounter physical and systemic barriers to participation. For this reason, when discussing power dynamics and who decides who benefits from climate action, it is difficult to ignore the overlapping impacts, be it **gender**, **cultural**, or **racial dynamics** (amongst other categorizations), that may determine who is inadvertently excluded. However, these challenges rarely exist in isolation, and many individuals face cross-cutting forms of disadvantage that interact and reinforce one another, a dynamic known as **intersectionality**. Without an intentional focus on inclusion, these groups remain at risk of being excluded from the benefits of the climate transition.


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Therefore, we must ask ourselves: how do we embed social equity and justice into climate action so that we meaningfully take these multifaceted considerations into account?

A key step towards just and inclusive climate action is to actually understand the specific needs, everyday realities, and participation barriers of disadvantaged individuals and groups, and engage them through considerate efforts.

Based on this recognition, climate measures can then be designed to address those needs, ideally in collaboration with target communities. It is essential to ensure that their perspectives shape the design of climate measures from the outset.

Beyond individual projects, it is important to embed an equity lens strategically across the city administration and align climate goals with social inclusion objectives across departments, budgets, and long-term planning frameworks.

Only through this integrated approach can local governments ensure that climate action contributes not only to decarbonization, but also to greater social justice locally, recognizing that these are not consecutive steps, but **interconnected efforts** that must go hand-in-hand. This is crucial because failing to address social equity can lead to public resistance, policy failure, and deepening inequalities, whereas inclusive climate strategies improve **implementation success, reduce long-term costs**, and **build resilient communities** that are better equipped to adapt to climate change impacts.

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **BONN, GERMANY**

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Strategically strengthening social justice in community climate action through local engagement spaces

Through its 'climate districts'[2] initiative, the City of Bonn is taking a strategic approach to diversifying public engagement in neighborhood-level climate action. Four pilot districts have been launched in 2024 and 2025, each with a specific focus that resonates with the local fabric of the respective community.

Understanding target group needs and addressing participation barriers

To strengthen existing structures, well-connected, locally embedded civil society representatives are appointed as 'transition managers' to establish physical participation centers and engage directly with local populations. This approach builds trust through existing relationships, and encourages widespread involvement, making related initiatives genuinely more inclusive and reflective of diverse community needs.

For example, in the socio-economically disadvantaged district of Medinghoven, where many young people and families from diverse backgrounds live, the climate district focuses on participation, equal opportunities, and social stability in order to strengthen social resilience.

Embedding equity into the design of climate measures

Launched under Bonn's climate neutrality agenda, the explicit goals of the climate districts initiative include equity objectives, such as strengthening individual agency by expanding access to skills, information, and resources, and recognizing and supporting existing forms of local engagement. Another key focus is on building inclusive social networks by fostering dialogue among neighbors and mutual support across different generations, languages, and social groups. To support implementation, project templates ask local organizers to reflect on how their activities align with these goals and to identify relevant target groups. Particular attention is given to reaching and involving people who have been underrepresented in neighborhood life, including children and youth, people with disabilities, individuals with migration experience, and residents with limited socioeconomic resources.

Strategically driving socially just climate action within the municipality

The climate districts initiative has been set up by the citizen participation unit in collaboration with the climate coordination office, as part of the 'Society' action area of the climate plan. Its strategic focus on aligning climate and equity objectives is also reflected in its collaborative governance approach. A central element is the 'KompetenzNetz', an innovative co-ordinating structure that brings together key actors from both civil society and the city administration. This collaborative framework fosters mutual learning and capacity building, while ensuring that planning and decision-making are shared and informed by a diversity of perspectives.

2 Bundesstadt Bonn, Website.

1. COMMUNITY INCLUSION CHALLENGES

Understanding target group needs and addressing participation barriers

This chapter explores the **main challenges in fostering community inclusion** into local climate action and outlines strategies to overcome them. Achieving a just and inclusive climate transition requires understanding the specific needs and daily realities of diverse target groups and establishing effective mechanisms for their participation.

In reality, **accessibility challenges** limit the participation of disadvantaged communities in climate mitigation programs through obstacles such as:

- Upfront financial barriers;
- Lack of agency for tenants;
- Limited awareness and language barriers;
- Lack of time and capacity;
- Institutional mistrust;
- Bureaucratic complexity;
- Concerns about social benefits; and
- Poor access to services.

To address these barriers, a key step towards equitable climate programs is **identifying and understanding communities** facing challenges through:

- Recognizing the diversity of lived experiences;
- Building on the expertise of social departments and service providers;
- Using data-driven approaches and equity indicators; and
- Creating inclusive spaces for dialogue.

Once communities are identified, **enabling participation through information and support** requires diverse and accessible outreach approaches that include:

- Addressing language barriers;
- Relying on tangible, hands-on examples and practical workshops;
- Adopting a personal, direct approach;
- Investing in long-term relationships; and
- Demonstrating cultural sensitivity.

Most importantly, cities can **act as enablers**, creating conditions for communities to **lead and shape solutions themselves** by:

- Offering funding and resources;
- Sharing decision-making power; and
- Working with trusted local messengers.

KEY LEARNINGS

A multiplier effect emerges from recognizing diverse lived experiences, building relationships and implementing inclusive communication strategies. Gaining trust takes time and capacity, and care should be taken to maintain these relationships through institutional changes. Even if steps may seem small, consistent efforts build momentum and are rewarded over time.

1.1. Accessibility challenges of traditional climate action

As previously discussed, disadvantaged groups often face significant barriers to accessing funding and other support from climate mitigation programs. These programs tend to primarily benefit homeowners and higher-income households, who are more likely to be able to afford upfront costs, navigate complex application procedures, and be better informed about the existence of available support.

In contrast, people from disadvantaged groups may encounter **multiple, overlapping challenges** that limit their participation, including:

- **Upfront financial barriers:** Energy upgrades as well as most subsidy programs require significant upfront investments before savings are actually realized or reimbursements are issued. Individuals from low-income households are more likely to struggle with affording these initial costs.
- **Lack of agency for tenants:** Many climate and energy programs focus on buildings, e.g. insulation, new heating systems, solar installations, or even access to cargo bikes, which require secure parking spaces. However, tenants, in particular, often have little to no say in what happens to their building and no influence over building-related improvements.
- **Limited awareness and language barriers:** If information about climate programs is not communicated clearly and simply, with limited use of technical jargon, or not available in different languages, relevant target groups are likely to miss out. Even if residents are aware of relevant support programs, some might be unsure about how it could apply to their situation.
- **Lack of time and capacity:** Daily pressures, limited resources, and competing priorities may sideline climate issues and make it harder to engage.
- **Institutional mistrust:** Negative past experiences with public authorities can lead to skepticism toward public programs or services. This goes both ways: residents may feel judged or ignored, while institutions may assume a lack of interest or cooperation. Often, disadvantaged residents and communities are also underrepresented within municipal administrations and decision-making structures.
- **Bureaucratic complexity:** Energy-related programs often come with complex eligibility criteria, technical language, and complex application processes. Without support, these hurdles can discourage and exclude those who are most in need.

> “Many residents face urgent everyday concerns – housing, care, income – making climate issues seem abstract or secondary. Participation fails when formats ignore these realities. Our climate districts aim to overcome this by creating trusted, local spaces with offers that connect climate action to people’s lives, where neighbors learn from each other, receive tailored support, and explore what climate action means in their context.”
>
> — Raphael Karutz *(City of Bonn, Germany)*

Figure 1: Accessibility challenges for equity target groups[3]

- **Concerns about social benefits:** Target groups may be hesitant to participate in subsidy programs because of fears surrounding how it may impact their social security payments. Often, neither local authorities nor recipients of basic income support know to what extent subsidies may be counted as income, thus leading to reductions in benefits.
- **Poor access to services:** For some residents, even taking the first step toward participation is made difficult by missing digital or physical infrastructure. Without access to a printer or computer, or with limited public transport, or inaccessible buildings, reaching municipal services or completing necessary paperwork can become a major barrier.

1.2. Laying the groundwork for collaboration with underserved communities

When addressing these accessibility barriers, an improved understanding of target groups and their everyday realities is needed in order to strengthen the inclusivity and fairness of municipal climate programs. As a first step, local governments can enhance this understanding by **identifying communities that face the greatest barriers when implementing climate-friendly measures in the local context.**

Concretely, local governments can take several steps to strengthen their understanding of underrepresented populations and improve equity outcomes:

- **Recognizing the diversity of lived experiences**, financial situations, language backgrounds, and physical abilities can help to ensure that climate-related resources and opportunities are more equitably distributed. For example, this can be achieved by training municipal staff, beginning with sensitization workshops during staff onboarding, followed by regular refresher sessions.
- **Building on the expertise of social departments and service providers** can give access to valuable demographic data and insights into which groups face the greatest barriers when participating in or benefiting from climate action.

3 Adjusted from ICLEI (2024). Climate Equity Toolbox, p. 13.

- **Data-driven approaches and equity indicators** to map inequalities and identify patterns of disadvantage can support clearer, more transparent planning and decision-making, e.g. by combining diverse data-sets and neighborhoods at risk. However, both the data and the analysis used to interpret it can reflect blind spots or biases. While data may appear objective, it can still overlook communities or systemic issues depending on what is collected, how, and by whom. Therefore, it is always recommended to combine purely data-driven approaches with ground-level interventions and direct interaction with target groups. This can include collecting feedback from residents during application processes or community engagement activities.

By **creating inclusive spaces for dialogue** and actively seeking out underrepresented voices, local governments can address these risks and build stronger relationships with their communities. This can be done through collaboration with trusted local partners such as neighborhood managers, energy advisors, social services, and community-led initiatives.

In the following chapters, we will look more closely into aspects of targeted community outreach and collaboration. The aspect of working with trusted local messengers or 'multipliers' will be specifically elaborated in ***chapter 1.4*** →.

> The biggest obstacle to achieving socially just climate protection is the lack of information about marginalised groups. Although current regulations aim to cover all citizens, they fail to address the specific needs of different groups. This is particularly evident in subsidy programmes, where social justice continues to play a subordinate role. Specific support in this area requires the political will to further include marginalised groups.
>
> — Christopher Sadlowski ***(City of Dortmund, Germany)***

CITIES SPOTLIGHT • **DORTMUND, ESSEN & SAN JOSÉ**

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Data-driven approaches for identifying and improving community needs

Building on the need to understand target group realities and improve equity outcomes, the cities of Dortmund, Essen, and San José offer compelling examples of how data-driven approaches can illuminate barriers and guide more inclusive climate action. These cities, each working within different contexts and stages of implementation, demonstrate how targeted studies and equity indicators can help local governments move beyond assumptions and towards meaningful collaboration with communities that are underserved.

For the **City of Essen (Germany)**, an evaluation of its cargo bike subsidy program[4] is being conducted to assess how well it serves its households of low-income. Through surveys, interviews, and administrative data analysis, the study seeks to identify why certain groups may not be accessing the program and how it can be redesigned to better meet their needs. Similarly, **Dortmund (Germany)** is planning a baseline study[5] to explore how climate protection funding and communication can be tailored to groups who have been systemically neglected by climate action. This includes mapping local disadvantages, identifying support needs, and developing a checklist for inclusive program design. Both cities are using data not just to measure impact, but to actively reshape their offerings to align with the lived realities of their communities.

San José (USA) complements these efforts with a tried and tested equity planning model grounded in data and community engagement. Using tools like CalEnviroScreen[6] and custom indicators, the city has identified neighborhoods with vulnerability and targets them for support through initiatives like the Zero Emissions Neighborhood pilot.[7] The Santee neighborhood was selected for focused engagement based on these indicators, demonstrating how data can guide resources to where they are most needed.

Together, these three cities show that when data is used thoughtfully and inclusively, it becomes a powerful tool for identifying needs and ensuring that climate action reaches those who need it most.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Utilizing data to identify barriers, include underserved groups, and support fair and effective climate action in cities.

4 Stadt Essen, Website.
5 Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Website.
6 State of California - Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), Website.
7 City of San José, Website. Zero Emissions Neighborhood Pilot.

1.3. Effective community outreach and engagement

To regain trust and encourage participation from structurally underserved groups, **effective community outreach and engagement** requires a variety of accessible and targeted approaches.

Target-group oriented communication is a way to raise awareness about municipal programs and disseminate information in a way that is accessible, relatable and engaging for the target group. Constructive outreach starts with **simple, clear language, and visual design**, in combination with short sentences, everyday terms, and direct messaging that highlights personal benefits. A **friendly 'you' tone** fosters closeness and lowers perceived bureaucratic barriers, especially when paired with motivating, positive framing. **Featuring real people** sharing their own experiences creates authenticity and familiarity, while visuals should reflect the diversity of the audience in addition to avoiding stereotypes. Visually engaging design is also essential. It should carefully consider clear contrasts, intuitive symbols, and **illustrations or images** that relate to one another and guide the viewer's eye toward the key message and call to action. The use of **QR codes** and hashtags can be especially useful here when linking multilingual content and enhancing the accessibility of application platforms and further information. Above all, effective communication should have clear, **benefit-driven calls to action** that are upfront and center. This approach not only enhances accessibility but also affirms the value and agency of the target audience, making climate initiatives more participatory and socially just.

To **overcome language barriers**, it is helpful to provide information and project materials in simple language and translate them into relevant local languages. While digital tools and AI offer valuable support, personalized, face-to-face interactions with native speakers add further value by allowing people to ask questions and better understand the process. Tailoring communication through target group specific, multi-channel campaigns ensures messages reach diverse audiences. In this context, it is noteworthy that printed materials such as flyers or booklets remain an effective first point of contact,

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whether distributed door-to-door or made available at key locations, especially for certain groups like senior residents. This was a key finding from a number of the INCLU:DE project cities.

Publicly **displaying tangible, hands-on offers**, such as PV installations or cargo bikes that people can see and try out, creates an inviting and accessible first point of contact and can help to reduce uncertainties around technical topics. Offering **practical workshops**, for example on installing balcony solar modules, can further empower participants with hands-on knowledge, and lower perceived technical barriers.

Across outreach efforts, a **personal, direct approach** remains crucial: being regularly present in neighborhoods through management offices, climate meetings, or one-stop shops builds familiarity, develops effective synergies, and enables open conversation about a variety of topics and opportunities. Offering personal support with application processes can also help to lower participation barriers, especially for those unfamiliar with administrative procedures. Making use of existing social infrastructure, such as community centers, local associations, or trusted neighborhood institutions, further enhances accessibility and reach. Experiences from INCLU:DE project cities underscore the need for tailored, culturally sensitive outreach strategies and the importance of **investing in long-term relationships** to ensure equitable access to city programs.

Although working closely with residents is often time-consuming and may face efficiency challenges, **partnering with civil society organizations and neighborhood managers**, for example, helps to tap into existing local networks and establish the essential trust needed for success. Regarding the latter, as we will see in the ***next section*** →, **community ambassadors** an play a crucial role here by acting as relatable, trusted intermediaries, and by developing genuine engagement and empowerment within their communities.

> The main barriers lie in making climate action tangible and accessible for all target groups. Practical solutions like balcony solar panels often remain unknown without clear, simple information and local demonstration. Socially just climate needs building trust through local networks and funding structures that do not exclude those with low incomes. Without early involvement of motivated community actors and practical communication, well-intentioned projects risk missing the people who would need most support.
>
> — Viktoria Reith ***(City of Heidelberg, Germany)***

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Inclusive communication campaigns for local climate programs

To ensure that structurally underserved communities are included in outreach and engagement efforts, cities such as Heidelberg and Ludwigsburg are revisiting how they use target-group oriented communication to promote their climate subsidy programs.

For **Ludwigsburg**, as part of its climate neutrality campaign in 2024, the city launched the 'Lust auf' (In the mood for) campaign, and took the opportunity to redesign its communication materials for those Ludwigsburg-Card[8] holders eligible for the balcony PV subsidy. The updated flyer was designed to speak directly to its target audience by using simple language, highlighting relatable benefits ("a balcony PV covers the annual electricity needs of your dishwasher and refrigerator"), and clearly outlining the application steps. It included direct contact points, links, and a QR code to a newly accessible website.

Recognizing that public buses are a key space for reaching residents with low-income, Ludwigsburg is also planning a bus campaign guided by ICLEI's detailed design guidelines, which emphasizes simple language, multilingual access, and benefit-driven calls to action.

Heidelberg has taken a similar approach, focusing on the Hasenleiser neighborhood. Here, local trusted multipliers confirmed that (contrary to popular belief) printed leaflets remain an effective outreach tool. The city, therefore, redesigned its flyer for the Heidelberg-Card Balcony PV subsidy program with the same principles in mind: easy language, a clear process, engaging visuals, and a strong call to action.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: By adopting inclusive communication strategies, municipalities can direct their outreach more efficiently towards target groups.

8 For low-income residents receiving social support in participating German municipalities, the card program allows for discounts on certain services.

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **HEIDELBERG, GERMANY**

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Enabling participation through community engagement in the Hasenleiser District

In 2022, Heidelberg expanded its long-running 'Efficient Use of Energy' subsidy program[9] to also offer balcony solar modules to Heidelberg-Card holders for a fraction of the usual price. Yet, uptake remained low especially in Hasenleiser, a 1970s compact urban area marked by energy poverty, high carbon dioxide (CO_2) reduction potential, and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Rather than city-wide outreach, Heidelberg focused on the Hasenleiser district, enabling relationship-building, practical experimentation, and solutions tailored to community dynamics. Partnering with trusted actors such as the District Management office and Hasenleiser Advisory Board leveraged local networks and knowledge. In order to make technology more tangible, e.g. to residents with limited familiarity with balcony solar technology, two demonstration modules were installed at the District Management office as visible, hands-on examples.

Using targeted communication and support, the city also focused on key intermediaries, such as District Management staff and Procurement Advisory Board members, who received training on balcony solar and the subsidy program. This allowed them to act as local multipliers. Information materials were designed in plain language, with 'How-To' guides highlighting the benefits of balcony solar systems, and printed flyers that were to be distributed via trusted local channels. Upcoming actions include a summer 2025 flyer campaign and interactive activities, such as installation challenges at community events like the *Halligalli Festival*, to link climate action with positive local experiences.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Building strong partnerships by having clear roles, timely training, accessible program design, and investing time in relationships is essential for effective and inclusive community engagement.

9 Stadt Heidelberg, Website.

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1.4. Empowering communities to shape climate action

Taking engagement one step further, truly empowering communities to participate in climate action requires more than just inviting people to take part. It is about creating conditions for communities to lead and shape solutions themselves, resulting in increased ownership of programmes, processes and their neighborhoods. In this role, **the city becomes a supporter**, helping to remove barriers and strengthen what residents are often already doing. Key aspects of such a community-led approach include:

Offering funding and resources

Many cities have found that **effective climate projects are already happening** at the local level, led by residents. These might be neighborhood events, community housing initiatives, or local environmental projects. Cities can support these efforts by **providing financial support, and offering visibility, space, or technical help**, and **covering practical needs** like meeting spaces, childcare, food, or compensation for peoples' time. These small support efforts can make a big difference in who is able to participate.

Sharing decision-making power

Municipalities that take this approach often ensure that **people who have firsthand experience** with climate impacts and inequality have a real voice in shaping strategies. Some do this by setting up advisory groups that include both community members and technical experts for participatory decision-making. This can be achieved through community-led bodies that empower local leaders to guide initiatives from the start, or through advisory groups that blend municipal staff with residents to co-develop plans.

Working with trusted local messengers

As we have already seen in ***chapters 1.2*** and ***1.3***, some cities are successfully working with **community ambassadors**. Such ambassadors are local residents who are well-connected and trusted in their neighborhoods. They may be neighborhood managers, social workers, or representatives from churches, cultural organizations, sports clubs, or other local groups and civil society organizations. Acting as multipliers, they can assist with reaching

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out to residents who usually do not take part in city processes, e.g. by helping with door-to-door outreach, phone calls, or surveys. In addition, they can provide or connect residents to consulting services, and help to gather input from the community to inform municipal planning and policy. Properly compensating and training such multipliers is recommended in order to professionalize their involvement and ultimately reach more people. This includes being prepared to respond to related concerns beyond the immediate project scope, as community outreach often brings up broader issues that matter locally. Multipliers are more likely to succeed when they have the flexibility to shape their activities, set priorities, and adapt their approach based on the needs of the community.

In short, empowering communities means that cities ultimately **step back in order to make space for others to step forward**, be it through offering support, sharing power, and trusting communities to lead the way.

Based on targeted community outreach and collaboration, INCLU:DE cities have worked to improve their climate programs by setting clear equity goals and tackling the accessibility issues we identified in this chapter. In the process, we have seen that designing equity-focused climate programs not only depends on **understanding the needs and realities of disadvantaged populations**, but also on a clear conceptual understanding of **what equity entails**. For this purpose, before providing concrete pathways to address accessibility challenges highlighted above, the next chapter introduces a simple framework that helps to design equity-focused projects and monitor their outcomes.

> “I will continue engaging with key actors and community multipliers, since ongoing dialogue is essential for socially just climate action and strengthens social cohesion. It is also important to integrate equity into broader city projects. One effective example was offering financial support to low-income households, making climate action more accessible and inclusive.”
>
> — Lena Völlinger ***(City of Ludwigsburg, Germany)***

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **BRISTOL, UNITED KINGDOM**

Elevating local voices in climate decision-making

As a city with a diverse social fabric and a strong history of civil society movements, Bristol places a central focus on sharing and delegating power to residents and local communities, in order to ensure structural inequalities are not perpetuated in the local transition. The city has fostered a lasting relationship with the local non-profit Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership. Whilst the city is a core partner and supports the work, the Partnership remains an independent, member-based organization that leads the Community Climate Action project,[10] which is an initiative that engages with diverse local communities to deliver climate justice. Based on their Community Climate and Nature Action Model,[11] Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership supports the strategic inclusion of diverse communities in low-carbon transition planning and delivery.

After an inclusive recruitment process followed by a year-long training and mentoring phase, 17 Community Climate Action Plans were co-created with diverse community organizations, representing various geographies, demographics, and interests, with emphasis on different groups experiencing inequality. These plans outline climate and social priorities across seven themes: Transport, Homes and Buildings, Energy, Food, Waste and Resources, Nature and Business, Economy, and Education. They serve as a way to give agency to the people, provide evidence of their diverse needs, and amplify their voices. By informing policy, the plans help to address blind spots in municipal planning and increase community buy-in, ensuring more integrated and inclusive processes.

In addition, the Community Leadership Panel[12] offers a scalable, place-based model that empowers communities to actively shape strategic initiatives from the early stages of planning. Composed of representative community leaders (who are compensated for their time), the panel convenes regularly to review project policy and strategy proposals on city or regional level, serving as a 'critical friend' in the decision-making process. By moving beyond passive, late-stage consultations offering limited influence, the panel plays a decisive role, fostering a trusted and transparent relationship between civil society and the municipality. This, in turn, leads to more just and inclusive policies that avoid creating unintended barriers and/or compounding existing inequities in the local context.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Open up power to self-organized communities, providing mandates for bottom-up co-creation, and integrating these processes into municipal decision-making, can lead to more effective and equitable climate initiatives.

10 Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership, Website. Community Climate Action.
11 Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership (2025).
12 Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership, Website. Community Leadership Panel.

2. CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

Embedding equity into the design of climate measures

This chapter addresses the conceptual challenges of embedding equity into the design of climate measures, advocating for climate protection programs to be equitable by design, not as an afterthought. Moving from conceptual understanding to practical application, it offers a framework and concrete strategies for municipalities to design climate programs, policies and projects that simultaneously reduce emissions and foster social equity.

The Equity Framework is based on three tangible dimensions:

Access: Fair access to resources, services and infrastructures;

Participation: Inclusive engagement, co-creation with local actors, and support for community efforts; and

Opportunity: Promoting diversity in the workforce, offering training and support programs, shaping a more inclusive local labor market.

To make climate programs more inclusive, their design must **proactively address common accessibility barriers** though strategies such as:

- Simplifying Application Processes;
- Avoiding 'First-Come, First-Served' Models;
- Reducing Financial Barriers;
- Supporting Tenants; and
- Offering Personal Consultation.

For better project outcomes, **collaboration with diverse local stakeholders** is essential, involving:

- Establishing advisory groups;
- Collaborating with technical, commercial and academic stakeholders; and
- Implementing shared, accessible processes.

Finally, municipalities can amplify their impact by f**ostering and supporting community-led programs**, including:

- Facilitating inclusive program design and governance;
- Integrating equity into financing and funding mechanisms;
- Working effectively with local civil society organizations;
- Ensuring funding and support for participation of low-income households; and
- Promoting replication and scaling of successful models.

KEY LEARNINGS

Adopting a 'think big, act small' approach, broader and impactful change can grow from small, trust-building interventions that remain flexible to meet evolving community needs.

© ICLEI

2.1. A framework for integrating equity into project design

Climate protection programs, projects, and policies should be made equitable by design. However, for this to happen, it involves developing a more practical and tailored understanding of equity for a specific program and local context, integrating it throughout the phases of planning, implementation, and evaluation, and creating space for ongoing processes of reflection and engagement. Using a social equity framework can be a good starting point for reviewing and revising municipal programs or individual projects, so as to not treat equity as an afterthought.

The following three dimensions[13] can be used in communication, planning, and project design. In climate planning, they help to assess where proposed measures might affect social equity (mapping of risks and opportunities). In individual projects, they help to consider how specific actions can be designed to improve equity outcomes in practical ways.

Access

In cities, access to resources, services, and infrastructure are often shaped by where people live, their income, age, gender, origin, or language. To ensure all residents are meaningfully included, local governments can identify gaps and provide targeted support, while prioritizing inclusive urban planning that serves all residents.

- **Geographic access:** Applying place-based approaches to support disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- **Demographic access:** Ensuring fair access irrespective of gender, age, abilities and origin.
- **Economic access:** Installing targeted funding mechanisms to empower communities of low income.

13 ICLEI (2022), p. 9.

Participation

Equitable design-making depends on involving residents, especially underrepresented groups, in decision-making and early planning stages. Programs created with communities, rather than for them, are more likely to meet local needs and deliver long-term impact. This requires inclusive engagement, co-creation with local actors, and support for community-led sustainability efforts already in place.

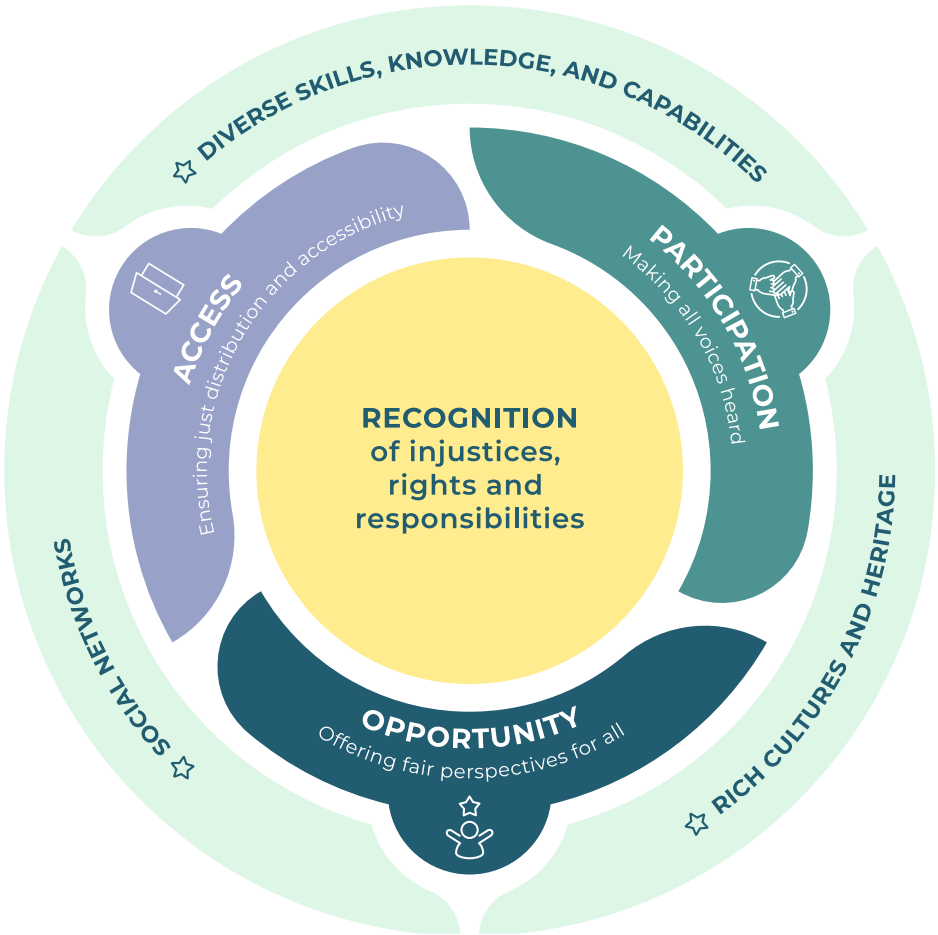
- **Representative participation:** Identifying locally relevant target groups when designing inclusive programs.
- **Engaging participation:** Co-creating with local stakeholders through various channels.
- **Collaborative participation:** Supporting and strengthening existing community initiatives.

Opportunity

Creating fair opportunities for all means looking beyond immediate needs and investing in long-term prospects. Local governments can lead by example: promoting diversity in their own workforce, offering training and support programs, and helping to shape a more inclusive and resilient local labor market.

- **Employment opportunities:** Prioritizing disadvantaged groups in municipal employment programs.
- **Training opportunities:** Addressing skills gaps, educational inequalities, while boosting employability through training and upskilling.
- **Market opportunities:** Supporting the market conditions for long-term equity outcomes.

Figure 2: The Social Equity Framework



A first and essential step in using these dimensions to strengthen equity outcomes is **recognition** of the historic and ongoing inequalities that shape life in the city today, along with the **shared rights and responsibilities** that arise from them. These include both the right to a safe, clean, and sustainable environment, and the right to participate meaningfully in environmental and public decision-making - paired with the responsibility of public institutions to protect these rights and ensure inclusive, equitable processes.[14]

Efforts to improve equity by enhancing access, participation, and opportunities for disadvantaged populations should not only address barriers, but also recognize and build on existing strengths within communities. Embedding equity in program design means valuing and supporting the assets that are already there, such as **diverse cultures and heritage, social networks**, and the wide range of **skills, knowledge, and capabilities** that residents bring. These elements often serve as the foundation for mutual support, resilience, and local innovation.

When designing climate and environmental interventions, a **shared definition** and concept of equity enables local governments to enhance equity outcomes, especially for disadvantaged groups.

To put this into practice, local governments can review new projects and programmes against a set of equity-focused questions to make sure it benefits those most affected. For example, questions that reflect the diversity of local communities to include or examine the current distribution of investments help to refocus attention on underserved groups and shape engagement processes around their needs.[15] Such questions can serve as a guide for developing new projects, informing funding decisions, and evaluating the equity outcomes of existing initiatives. In Turku, Finland, social equity is a central focus in planning circular economy interventions to support the city's 2029 carbon neutrality goal. The three equity dimensions are mapped across the five priority sectors of Turku's Circular Economy Roadmap[16], identifying approaches to strengthen *access, participation* and *opportunity* outcomes.

While relying on participation is one way or aspect to integrate equity in the design of climate plans and projects, it is also relevant for the design process itself, as demonstrated by Austin's inclusive approach to developing its Climate Equity Plan.

> The key challenge is aligning ecological modernization with social justice. Climate action must reduce emissions without placing disproportionate burdens on low-income or vulnerable groups. These communities are often hard to reach, as climate issues aren't always their top priority. Tailored, relatable communication is crucial—but developing truly targeted and effective offers for these groups remains a complex task.
>
> — Lena Völlinger ***(City of Ludwigsburg, Germany)***

14 See United Nations General Assembly (1998) and United Nations General Assembly (2022).
15 For examples on guiding questions by framework dimensions, see ICLEI (2024). Climate Equity Toolbox, p. 41-43.
16 Circular Turku (2021), p. 13.

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **AUSTIN, USA**

Conceptualizing the Austin Climate Equity Plan in an inclusive way

What does equity mean in the local context and how can residents feel ownership and be empowered to participate in climate measures? Developed through a collaborative process involving city staff and community stakeholders, the City of Austin's Climate Equity Plan is an example of integrating climate goals with a locally defined set of equity principles: Health, Affordability, Accessibility, Cultural Preservation, Community Capacity, Just Transition, and Accountability. These principles serve as criteria for evaluating proposed measures, ensuring that climate strategies are not only environmentally effective but also responsive to the lived experiences and needs of Austin's diverse communities.

To embed equity in both planning and implementation, Austin committed to collaborative planning by establishing advisory groups composed of municipal staff and community members. These groups guided the development of the plan's five sections, 17 goals, and over 50 strategies, ensuring that technical expertise was balanced with community insight. This participatory approach puts emphasis on equity through *representative and collaborative participation*, allowing residents, especially those from historically underserved groups, to shape the city's climate future.

Austin also prioritized inclusive outreach and capacity-building by engaging a network of community ambassadors/multipliers. These trusted local figures help identify concerns, conduct research, and support community-led initiatives, strengthening *geographic, demographic, and economic access* to climate programs. By strengthening ownership, building on community strengths, and aligning climate action with equity principles, Austin demonstrates how local governments can create meaningful, resilient, and socially just climate measures.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Understanding target group needs, being responsive to local priorities and creating a sense of ownership can foster the development of equitable and meaningful climate measures.

2.2. Addressing accessibility barriers to make climate programs more inclusive

Within the *access* dimension of the social equity framework, program design can be used to actively reduce barriers for disadvantaged communities to participate in climate programs. In this context, it helps to consider again the ***accessibility challenges*** for target groups and how to address them: Equity-focused design makes participation easier for people with limited financial means, language barriers, or unfamiliarity with complex application processes. If policymakers consider the social dimension from the very beginning of program design, they can build systems that are both effective and fair.

The following strategies can help to address accessibility barriers such as limited decision-making power, low awareness and access to services, bureaucratic complexity, and upfront financial contributions.

Simplifying application processes

Bureaucratic complexity is a common barrier, especially for those who have limited time, language skills, or experience with public administration. Programs can respond to this by simplifying application procedures, reducing the number of required documents, and offering step-by-step support. Clear language, translated materials, and visual instructions can help to guide people through the process. It is also important to provide both digital and analog options, so that no one is excluded due to lack of internet access or computer literacy.

Avoiding first-come, first-served pitfalls

Programs that allocate resources on a first-come, first-served basis often end up reinforcing existing inequalities. Groups with more time, better internet access, or greater awareness are often overrepresented. To avoid this, cities can introduce quotas for specific groups, stagger application periods, or prioritize applicants based on social or geographic criteria. These mechanisms help to ensure that public funds reach those who need them most.

Reducing financial barriers

Reducing or removing financial contributions helps to lower entry barriers, especially for low-income groups. Programs can minimize or fully waive required payments for these groups by staggering contributions by income, and avoid the need for upfront costs by working directly with local vendors. In-kind support, such as vouchers or direct discounts, can replace monetary transactions. Additional options to reduce financial burdens include allowing payment by installments, enabling the purchase of used items, or offering leasing.

> The City of Ludwigsburg has launched an inspiring initiative offering free balcony solar installations to low-income households through the Ludwigsburg Card program. After a simple online application, a subcontractor manages delivery, professional installation, and all necessary components. This is a practical, socially inclusive approach that promotes climate action while supporting low-income groups.
>
> — Viktoria Reith ***(City of Heidelberg, Germany)***

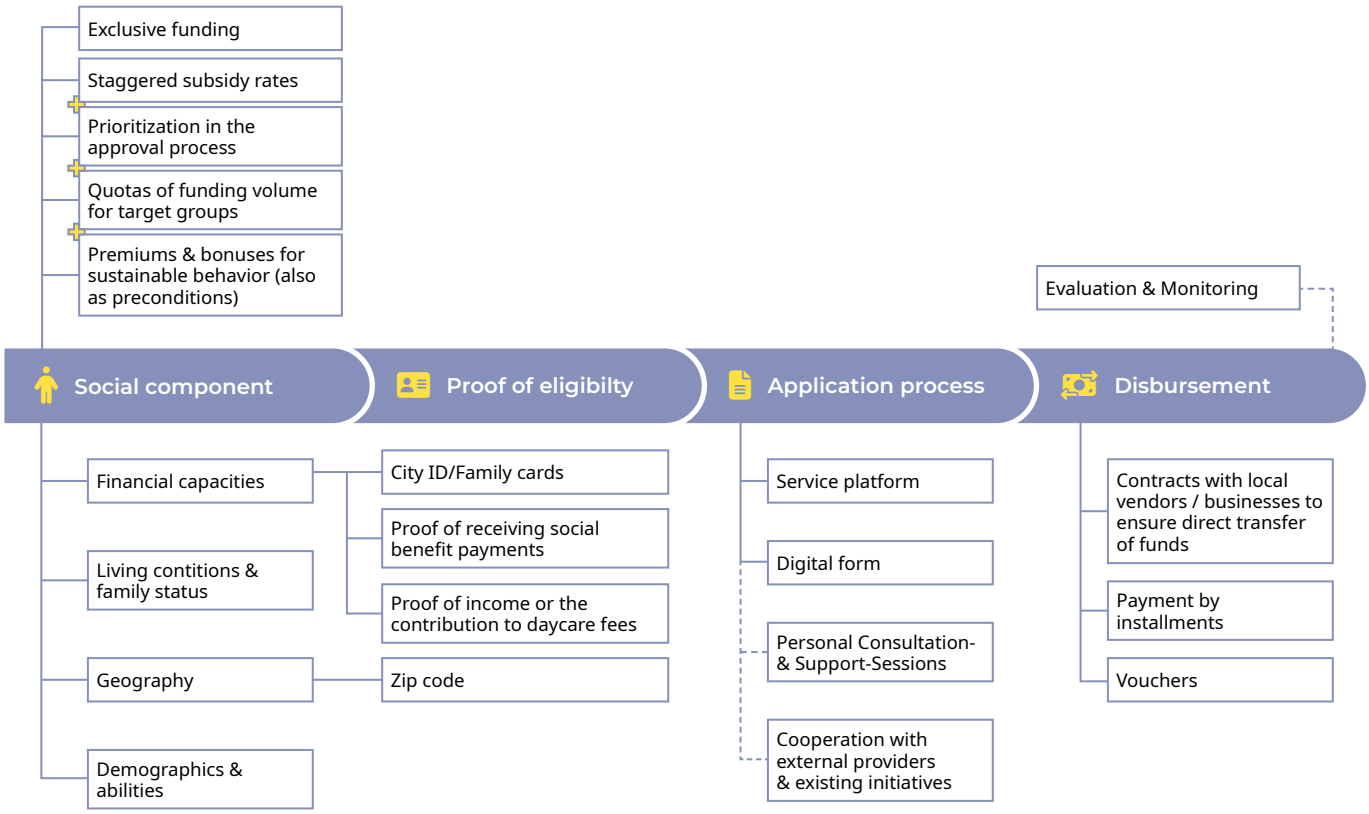


Figure 3: Designing municipal subsidy programs with equity in mind[17]

Supporting tenants and fostering collaboration

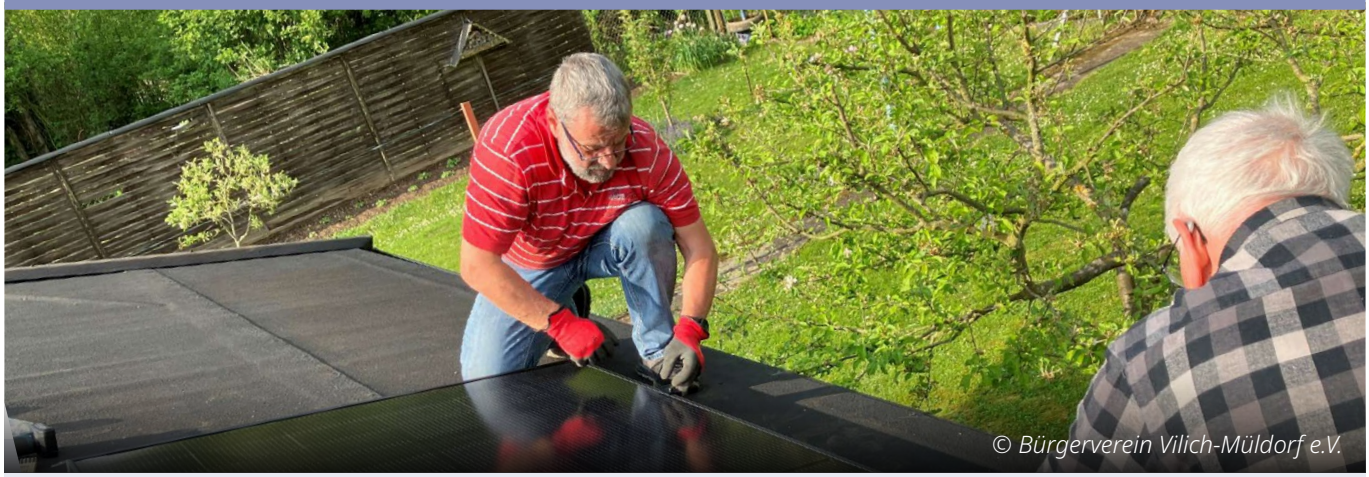
People who rent their homes or live in shared buildings often have limited power to act on their own. To respond to this challenge, programs can be designed to explicitly include these groups. This includes creating options that allow tenants to participate and encouraging cooperation between tenants, building owners, and housing associations. The municipality may take on the role of a convener and facilitator in such conversations. Offering legal information and support can also help to clarify roles and responsibilities, making it easier for tenants to take part in collective decisions.

Offering personal and decentralized consultation

Personalized, face-to-face consultation can play a key role in increasing participation. It helps to address both low awareness and limited technical knowledge by offering clear explanations of programs and application requirements, while making technologies approachable. Decentralized service points or mobile consultation units can also improve access for people who face geographic or mobility-related barriers, and increase awareness specifically in underrepresented areas.

17 ICLEI (2024). Climate Equity Toolbox, p. 16.

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **BONN, GERMANY**



© Bürgerverein Vilich-Müldorf e.V.

Grassroots solar adoption in Bonn fueled by balcony scouts

Leaning into Bonn's Climate Plan 2035,[18] which emphasizes the need for residents to 'get started on their own doorstep', the city is pioneering a new initiative hand-in-hand with the Vilich-Müldorf citizens' association. This initiative embodies one of the ways for tenants to access solar, which accelerates the adoption of solar energy for residents and enables those typically left behind in climate action. With the goal of turning every balcony into a small power plant, and thereby advancing Bonn's influence as the 'balcony power plant capital'[19], a two-day training was launched in spring 2025 to educate 18 volunteer 'Balkonscouts'.[20] These balcony scouts do not require prior knowledge to volunteer; they are selected to empower fellow residents, especially in low-income neighborhoods, by applying the 'train-the-trainer' approach to learn about everything from selecting and mounting modules to navigating subsidy regulations.

Upon request, the Balkonscouts will visit local residents at their homes for free, face-to-face sessions lasting around an hour. In addition, the city, through its *Solares Bonn* municipal funding program, further encourages this initiative by supporting tenants in purchasing plug-in solar devices. For Bonn-Card holders, the city's subsidy rate is increased from the standard 60 percent to up to 90 percent of the purchase price.

What is crucial about this bottom-up approach is that, in line with the climate ambitions and support of the city, it embeds expertise directly into the community via a civic association. Targeted assistance for prospective adopters is practical and personal, along with support in decoding technical jargon and complicated, bureaucratic matters. Furthermore, Bonn acknowledges the need for ensuring an affordable and accessible energy transition. This grassroots approach is instrumental for overcoming any concern from households of low-income surrounding limited access to information and prohibitive upfront costs.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Community-led solar initiatives and targeted support can make renewable energy more affordable and accessible for low-income households of low-income.

18 City of Bonn, Website.
19 City of Bonn (2024).
20 City of Bonn (2025).

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **ESSEN, GERMANY**

Revising funding guideline to improve effectiveness of financial support

In response to growing demand for sustainable mobility solutions and the need to ensure equitable access, the City of Essen has been looking to revise its cargo bike subsidy program.[21] Previously offering flat-rate financial support, the city introduced a staggered funding approach that adjusts subsidy levels based on applicants' income. This progressive approach ensures that households with lower incomes receive proportionally higher support, aligning the program with broader social equity goals. The revision was informed by a comprehensive evaluation, which emphasized the importance of targeting groups of socially disadvantaged backgrounds and assessing behavioural changes in mobility.

In order to streamline the application process and reduce administrative overhead, the city has aligned its income verification system with the existing framework used for kindergarten fee assessments. This integration has significantly lowered the burden on applicants and freed up capacity within the climate team, allowing for more strategic program oversight. By combining data-driven insights with thoughtful policy design, Essen's revised cargo bike subsidy program showcases how municipalities can enhance the impact of climate-related funding while promoting social justice and operational efficiency.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Maximizing progressive subsidy design, streamlined administration, and data-driven evaluation to enhance equitable access to sustainable mobility solutions.

Institutionalizing feedback and participation in program design

Cities can improve programs by learning from participant experiences. During the application process, it is helpful to ask for consent to use contact information for follow-up surveys and evaluations. This allows cities to gather feedback, understand outcomes, and adjust programs based on real needs. To address institutional mistrust, key steps are to involve target groups early in the design process and communicate clearly how their input is used. Following up on outcomes and showing accountability helps to build lasting trust and credibility.

Social components can be integrated by adapting existing program guidelines to the needs of specific target groups. Naturally, tailoring programs towards different groups and incomes may add complexity, for example, through additional steps to prove eligibility. Here, it might be helpful to learn from existing practices in other departments or municipalities that have already developed similar approaches.[21]

21 Stadt Essen, Website.

2.3. Collaborating with diverse local stakeholders for better program outcomes

As argued previously, collaboration among diverse stakeholders is essential to designing equitable climate programs, because it brings together different types of knowledge, lived experience, and practical insight. Beyond shaping program goals, specific stakeholders can also play a role in delivering services, sharing infrastructure, or reaching target groups, making their involvement valuable throughout the entire program cycle. This makes it important to consider not only *who* is involved, but also *how* collaboration is structured.

In early program stages, **establishing advisory groups** that bring together voices from labor, youth, environmental, and civil rights communities (and compensating them for their time) can help to ensure decisions reflect a broad range of lived experiences.

Collaboration with local technical, commercial, and academic partners can also improve equity outcomes in climate programs. Municipalities benefit from working with actors such as energy providers, housing associations, and local vendors, who often have existing relationships and infrastructure that can help to reach underserved populations. These partnerships can simplify program delivery, save costs, and provide tailored support that fits the specific needs and living conditions of different target groups. For example, city-owned utilities can contribute technical expertise for installing solar systems, and housing associations can support tenant-focused interventions at scale. Local research institutions can also be valuable partners by helping to identify which groups face the greatest barriers in a specific area and by providing data and analysis to guide more targeted interventions.

Effective collaboration does not stop at the planning stage; it requires **shared, accessible processes** during implementation as well. This can be challenging, especially when tools like digital platforms do not account for differing technical capacities, data standards, or software environments among partners. In these cases, starting with small, tangible interventions can help to establish workflows, allowing stakeholders to test approaches, learn together, and gradually develop systems that support deeper, long-term cooperation.

> The INCLU:DE project has helped a lot in placing social equity in the climate policy debate and provided us with valuable research and conceptual support that helped us with improving our policies.
>
> — Björn Ahaus ***(City of Essen, Germany)***

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **SAN JOSÉ, USA**

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Centering lived experience in climate program design through its Community Advisory Board

With reference to its Community Advisory Board, San José, California is considered a successful model for inclusive decision-making with regards to its development of the Electric Homes San José rebate program. The Electric Homes San José program is now closed, but during its development and implementation, the Community Advisory Board brought together a diverse mix of voices, including representatives from labor unions, youth and student groups, environmental advocates, and the civil rights organization NAACP. The 15 Board members were compensated for their time and contributions, which was not only a gesture of appreciation but removed barriers to participation, especially for individuals with lower-incomes and those balancing multiple responsibilities. In line with this, the city acknowledges that expertise is rooted in lived experience, and helps to ensure that engagement is not limited to those with the financial flexibility to volunteer.

When it comes to providing feedback on outreach strategies and community engagement, the board met regularly to discuss just initiative implementation. Their recommendations directly influenced the design of outreach materials, ensuring they were multilingual and culturally responsive. Furthermore, the board also played a key role in identifying barriers to participation, which informed adjustments to program eligibility and application processes. As a result of this model, the board informed broader equity efforts across San José's climate planning, bringing community insight into institutional processes and helping shape more inclusive, responsive, and effective strategies. These efforts now continue under the Climate Advisory Commission,[22] a committee of 11 San José residents that serve as a community voice in matters related to San José's Climate Smart initiatives, and advise and make recommendations to the City Council and the City Manager. The 11 members represent Council districts in San José, fields of technical expertise, youth, advocacy groups, as well as labor, business, or educational institutions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Inclusive advisory structures, fair compensation, and culturally responsive engagement can strengthen equity and effectiveness in climate program design.

22 City of San José, Website. Climate Advisory Commission.

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **LUDWIGSBURG, GERMANY**

© Benjamin Stollenberg

Innovating municipal processes for the inclusive implementation of climate programs

The City of Ludwigsburg illustrates the importance of a well-designed internal digital workflow for effective stakeholder collaboration and target group-oriented implementation of municipal climate programs.

Within its Climate Bonus program, the city adopted a new scheme, dedicated exclusively to holders of the Ludwigsburg-Card and their specific needs. This group can benefit from a 'care-free package' which manages the entire installation process centrally, and covers all associated costs, rendering the device completely free of charge for the applicant. Eligible households only have to declare their interest and provide basic contact information. The cities' cooperation partner then contacts the applicant to confirm eligibility and organize the purchase and installation.

Delivering this benefit requires close coordination between the Climate and Energy team, the municipal public utilities, and local technicians. However, since each of these partners operate within their own administrative system, coordination processes in the past created 'black boxes' in communication, making it difficult for partners to track progress and disrupt clarity with applicants.

To address this, the Climate and Energy team introduced a unified digital workflow using WordPress, replacing less flexible state-provided software. Now all partners can enter and access shared data in one place, ensuring synchronized operations and full transparency on process updates. This change has improved status tracking, reduced delays, and given all actors from office staff to installers the same up-to-date view of the process. The Ludwigsburg-Card program's complexity became the driving force behind this digital transformation, showing how internal systems can be rethought to turn fragmented communication into a streamlined, transparent workflow.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Invest time in building functioning internal systems to support cooperation and clarity.

© Kenny Eliason, Unsplash

2.4. How municipalities can foster or support community-led programs

In addition to setting up municipal programs with equity components (as discussed in previous chapters), municipalities can also **support existing community-led programs** and help enable the participation of underserved groups in these initiatives. By providing guidance, resources, and institutional backing, municipalities create opportunities for local residents to take ownership of climate actions, while ensuring that these efforts are inclusive and accessible.

Municipalities can play a vital role in supporting and scaling such initiatives by enabling participation from underserved groups and fostering inclusive, sustainable program design. Key ways municipalities can support community-led programs include:

Facilitating inclusive program design and governance

Municipalities can encourage local participation by helping to establish transparent governance structures that engage diverse community members from the outset. They can provide guidance on how to form legal entities, set internal regulations, and define membership rules that promote equity and shared ownership.

Integrating equity into financing and funding mechanisms

Municipalities can set tender conditions requiring meaningful local participation in renewable projects (for example, 50 percent coming from community involvement). They can support local climate or neighborhood funds that direct resources to disadvantaged groups and foster democratic decision-making. Additionally, municipalities can promote lease lending and match funding schemes to reduce financial risks for low-income households and to encourage solidarity within communities.

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **LUMIAR CIVIL PARISH, LISBON, PORTUGAL**

© Associação Viver Telheiras

Community-led programs for addressing energy poverty

Community-led programs, such as Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) and local climate funds, offer innovative pathways to address energy poverty and promote inclusive climate action. As part of the technical assistance provided by the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH), the European Commission's main initiative on energy poverty, the Telheiras/Lumiar Renewable Energy Community designed a citizen-led renewable energy initiative to reduce energy poverty locally by aiming to combine economic, ecological, and social benefits. The project followed several key steps: developing the concept based on community input, seeking technical partners, assessing national legal and regulatory frameworks, selecting suitable locations and renewable energy systems, and establishing a non-profit legal entity. Community engagement was central, with the local government social workers helping to identify vulnerable families and encourage their participation. Internal regulations were defined with member approval, and multiple communication channels were established to maintain active involvement.

In Lumiar, this resulted in solar panels being installed on a government building, and fifteen families (including three disadvantaged households) became members who shared in ownership and electricity benefits. The project also developed a financial and operational model aimed at long-term sustainability.

While creating energy communities remains complex and context-specific, this approach empowers residents to directly participate in climate solutions. Institutional support from municipalities can further enhance credibility and open new avenues for collaboration.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Community-led programs create meaningful synergies between social equity, economic opportunity, and environmental sustainability, offering an innovative pathway to address energy poverty.

Working effectively with local civil society organizations

See ***chapter 3.4*** →. This includes providing funding for civil society organizations (CSOs), but also extends to other pragmatic and flexible working structures.[23] For instance, adapting proposal and reporting structures to the organizations capacity, balancing project monitoring activities, and creating structured opportunities for CSOs to provide their own feedback on project collaboration approaches and outcomes.

Ensuring funding and support for participation of low-income households

Municipalities can provide direct financial support or subsidies to enable low-income families to participate in community-led climate programs. This can include covering membership fees, reducing upfront costs, or offering tailored assistance throughout the application and involvement process.

Promoting replication and scaling of successful models

Municipalities can facilitate knowledge exchange between communities and sectors, encouraging adaptation of proven mechanisms, e.g. from one energy domain (such as wind) to others (such as solar or heating). Supporting pilot projects and sharing best practices fosters wider adoption of community-led approaches.

In addition to prioritizing community collaboration and designing individual programs in an inclusive way, a key step forward towards strengthening equitable climate action is mainstreaming equitable climate action within municipal administrations. Adequate funding and support for individual programs will only be available if there is broad consensus to align climate and social goals, and a long-term commitment to look at societal benefits in a holistic way.

23 ICLEI (2023).

3. INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Strategically driving just climate action within the municipality

This chapter addresses the **institutional challenges** municipalities face when **embedding socially just climate action across the entire administration**. By shifting the focus from individual program design to the institutional landscape, concrete strategies for overcoming these hurdles are provided to ensure that equity becomes a core, sustainable component of municipal work.

Institutional barriers in city administrations include:

- **Challenging political and financial framework conditions:** Precarious finances and political prioritization create funding uncertainty, pitting climate action against core social services, hindering equity-focused innovation;
- **Capacity challenges:** Limited staff capacity is strained by time-intensive trust-building efforts and increased administrative complexity of implementing equity-focused programs;
- **Departmental siloes and role division:** Social equity requires cross-departmental collaboration, yet siloed structures can hinder this integration; and
- **Legal limitations:** Regulations related to data protection or social benefit calculations can unintentionally obstruct inclusive policy design.

The chapter provides **strategies for responding to these institutional barriers**, explaining how to:

- **Obtain political support & strategic mandates:** Advocate for stronger political mandates by using project outcomes and successes to gain buy-in from leaders and integrate social equity as core concept in municipal strategies such as climate and urban development plans;
- **Foster inter-departmental collaboration and internal capacity building:** Discover methods for breaking down siloes, such as establishing cross-departmental task forces, creating explicit job roles for social justice in climate action, and facilitating internal knowledge-sharing to build a shared understanding of equity goals;
- **Building strategic partnerships with civil society & other key stakeholders:** Understand the importance of involving motivated 'change-makers' and recognizing civil society organizations as trusted partners, not unpaid labor. This includes providing flexible funding and creating space for their feedback; and
- **Build enabling framework conditions for socially just climate action:** Advocate for clearer regulatory and legal frameworks, integrated funding, and shared governance arrangements at the national and EU levels to empower local action.

KEY LEARNINGS

Overcoming institutional barriers hinges on investing in collaborative structures - both internally across departments and externally with strategic partners. Securing political mandates and building enabling frameworks are crucial for transforming equitable climate action into a core principle of municipal governance.

3.1. Recognizing institutional barriers at the city level

It is important to recognize that structural barriers arise not only from the circumstances and lived realities of disadvantaged communities, but also from **challenges faced *by* city administrations themselves**. These include:

Challenging political and financial framework conditions

Local governments in many countries are operating in a political and financial environment where ongoing political and financial **support for climate policies is increasingly uncertain**.

Municipalities, particularly in Germany, are currently facing enormous **financial challenges**, having recorded the highest budgetary deficit in history.[24] This strained situation has forced local governments into a period of fiscal consolidation, marked by spending cuts, staff reductions, and delayed budget decisions. As a result, urgently needed investments in environmental and climate protection increasingly compete with essential social services and other mandatory tasks. Exacerbated by long-standing high debt levels, this precarious financial state leads to a reluctance to invest in short-term 'consumption-related expenditures' which meet immediate needs (versus long-term investments, e.g. in infrastructure), such as the municipal subsidy programs that are at the center of the INCLU:DE project. The pressure to consolidate and focus on 'core' tasks closes down room for innovation in climate action, including integrating equity components.

Climate departments also face uncertainty in terms of political continuity and prioritization of climate policies, as a result of the **declining perceived importance of climate protection** and Green Deal-related policies across Europe. This, allied with tight budgetary constraints, can lead to limited funding and planning reliability for municipalities. In many cases, the future continuation of certain programs is perceived to be uncertain especially in light of upcoming municipal elections.

Capacity challenges

Linked to this, cities experience a **lack of capacity among implementing personnel** for time-intensive processes. As highlighted previously, it is very time- and resource-intensive to create truly socially equitable climate measures. One example is the time required to meet and create trust-building within a target group and relevant potential multipliers. This often requires repeated in-person visits to neighborhoods, identifying, and potentially attending relevant district meetings - many of which might take place after conventional workplace hours.

Similarly, **adding social equity components to (subsidy) programs complicates administrative processes**. For instance, adding a social component to a subsidy program adds a requirement to review not just the application itself but also proof of target group status. This can put further pressure on already existing staff shortages.

> “Climate policies are under pressure due to economic turmoil and crisis, budget restrictions add up to a situation where it is becoming harder to uphold the climate agenda. Strengthening socially just climate action might be part of the solution in this context.”
>
> — Björn Ahaus ***(City of Essen, Germany)***

24 Statistisches Bundesamt (2025).

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Departmental siloes and role division

Many **climate topics overlap or transcend traditional organizational structures** and mandates, with different priorities and viewpoints, ultimately making the process more difficult. This can be even more intensified when climate policies explicitly aim to increase social equity and reduce inequalities - often requiring input and expertise from 'social' departments, which typically deal with areas like social and basic services, financial and housing support, children's welfare, etc. The link to climate is not always clear and **knowledge of city processes is decentralized**, with not one individual person or department being aware of all relevant services available.

A silo-busting co-creation approach is necessary for the development of contextualized and socially sensitive climate policies. Yet, this can be challenged by the complexity of clear role distribution, a **lack of understanding of a 'co-creation approach'** among stakeholders within (and beyond) the administration, and sometimes even instances of **outright resistance to collaboration**. Resistance may occur on an individual level, for instance, over different perspectives on the need to center social equity in climate programs. Or, it may be on an organizational level, for instance, by municipal housing associations imposing strict regulations on installation of balcony solar modules, thus undermining the municipality's objectives.

Legal barriers

The design of more socially equitable climate policies can be undermined by (often unforeseen) legal regulations. For instance, legal concerns can arise regarding **attempts to simplify the language** used in funding guidelines. **Data protection policies** can make it difficult to obtain feedback from prior applicants on where they heard of the offer or how the process can be improved. Subsidies and other forms of direct payments can create **uncertainty**[25] **for those on basic income support**, since an unclear legal framework in some countries does not adequately clarify that these should not be treated as forms of income for the purpose of calculating welfare support.

While many of these barriers are exacerbated by structural conditions, city administrations can still engage in strategic actions for institutional transformations to strengthen the internal capacity for equitable climate action.

25 ICLEI (2024). Chancengleichheit im Klimaschutz, p. 3.

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3.2. Obtaining political support and strategic mandates

In order to improve equity for climate programs in the long-term, those designing municipal climate programs need either **political support or strategic mandates at the operational level**. Embedding equity in climate programs often requires adjusting existing procedures, reframing goals, and allocating additional resources. These are steps that are only possible with sufficient institutional backing.

To do so, cities can seek to integrate **social equity and climate in municipal planning strategies**. This can mean connecting social and environmental priorities in urban planning strategies or introducing equity concepts into climate plans, for instance, as explicit goals or fields of action. While reference is often made to the ambition of equitable outcomes, the operationalization and implementation of this commitment is less clear. Here, smaller projects on inclusive climate action, such as the work undertaken by the INCLU:DE cities, can serve as piloting examples to scale up in the long-run.

One crucial entry point, therefore, is to **feed concrete project outcomes into the political process**, using tools such as guidebooks, evaluations, or stakeholder feedback to increase visibility and legitimacy. Reports should highlight the short- and long-term benefits of equitable climate action, including the improved synergy (and thus efficiency) between social and environmental objectives and the long-term support for the necessary transition. Highlighting and platforming both the need for political support and the successes already achieved on the ground can provide greater political visibility, build momentum, and foster continued action.

> “To make programs more accessible/to reduce participation barriers, we will need to reduce assumptions about disadvantaged groups. This process will take time, but will be implemented in future programmes. We will also pursue social justice more closely in other areas of climate protection and adaptation.”
>
> — Christopher Sadlowski
> ***(City of Dortmund, Germany)***

CITIES SPOTLIGHT • **DORTMUND & LUDWIGSBURG, GERMANY**

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Sharing project outcomes with city councils to secure political support

Both Dortmund and Ludwigsburg demonstrate how feeding INCLU:DE project results into the political sphere can catalyse institutional change towards more socially just climate action.

In **Dortmund**, project outcomes informed the redesign of a municipal funding program, integrating INCLU:DE recommendations, such as simplified language, structured application waves, digitalized processes, and support services. While some improvements still require council approval, early engagement of political actors has been pivotal. Bringing project results to the political level requires either political will or decision-making authority to implement socially just funding adaptations. This can be achieved through formal submissions of project results, targeted workshops to raise awareness among advisory bodies, as well as the integration of equity principles into long-term strategic frameworks such as the 'Climate City Contract'.

In **Ludwigsburg**, the project's social equity focus resonated strongly within the political sphere, despite municipal budget constraints. By transitioning from reimbursement-based subsidies to all-inclusive services, the city significantly increased participation among residents of low-income. Project visibility in local media and positive political feedback affirmed the relevance of equity-oriented climate funding.

Both cities underline the importance of strategically leveraging project outcomes to raise political awareness and institutionalize equity as a core climate policy objective.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Strategically leveraging project outcomes to raise political awareness and institutionalize equity as a core climate policy objective.

3.3. Fostering inter-departmental collaboration and internal capacity building

While it is challenging to overcome departmental siloes altogether, cities can foster inter-departmental learning and collaboration to leverage synergies for equitable climate action in various ways. Capacity building plays a crucial role in this process: without shared knowledge, awareness, and understanding, collaboration risks remaining formal rather than transformative. Workshops, trainings, and informal exchanges can therefore function as building blocks for mutual learning, helping to connect different departmental perspectives, identify complementarities, and build mutual support.

Joint workshops and knowledge sharing meetings can be a first step to bring departments together, while **inter-departmental task forces or project teams** on cross-cutting issues can lead to the development of common visions and structured collaboration. Additionally, some cities have developed **programmatic offices** that have the mandate to coordinate work on strategic cross-departmental issues, such as social justice, participation or the climate transition.

Crucially, the overall goal of 'inclusive climate action' should be explicitly **integrated into a person's or department's responsibility**. Failure to do this risks burdening motivated individuals to do this on top of their daily tasks, particularly since climate departments in Germany and other countries are typically assessed primarily according to their impact on CO_2 emissions reductions. With climate *adaptation* growing in importance, an opportunity arises to ensure that inclusive participation is more explicitly included as a key target for evaluating the success of climate actions.

At the same time, it is helpful wherever possible to **foster knowledge exchanges, open communication**, and networking opportunities among staff across different departments who might have a role to play in ensuring 'equitable climate action'. **Meetings and workshops** can help to develop a **common understanding of key concepts**, and also

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help connect diverse perspectives and entry points for equity and climate across the administration - ensuring that everybody feels part of a larger effort. **Awareness-raising** of such climate equity initiatives is also important to ensure that municipal staff can act as multipliers, linking to their own relevant processes and actors in their network.

Meaningful interdepartmental collaboration and internal capacity building are mutually reinforcing. Structured learning spaces help break down siloes and connect diverse perspectives, while collaborative structures provide the mandate and tools for equity knowledge to be applied in practice. Embedding equity into responsibilities, fostering participatory workshops, and cultivating shared awareness across departments can together strengthen inclusive climate governance and ensure that climate action delivers both environmental and social benefits.

> “Climate measures and social justice are closely intertwined. With our office for social justice we want to ensure that Bonn’s climate plan and its concrete measures are socially just, in their concept and implementation.”
>
> — Felicitas Müller
> ***(City of Bonn, Germany)***

CITY SPOTLIGHT • **MALMÖ, SWEDEN**

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Inter-departmental collaboration for a just transition

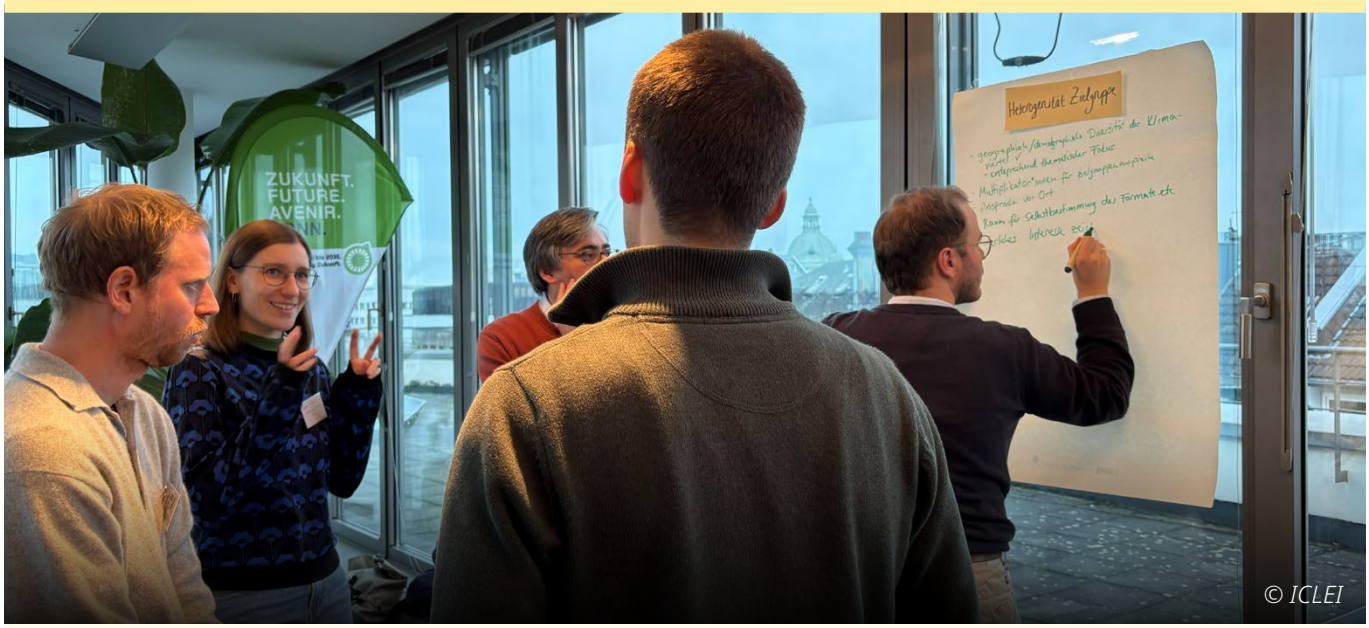
While inter-departmental collaboration poses a challenge for many local governments, for Malmö, the city's climate action efforts are rooted in a shared commitment across all departments to achieve social, economic, and environmental sustainability. This leverage point enables them to collaborate meaningfully on climate transition work, not by dismantling silos, but by building bridges through shared understanding and mutual learning.

In particular, the 'Climate Transition Team'[26] manages the city-wide climate transition process by coordinating and supporting activities across departments, including communication, monitoring, evaluation and analysis, sensemaking and learning, and stakeholder interaction. The team is also behind a range of supporting analyses and knowledge products, such as socio-economic impact assessments and evaluations of broader socio-economic co-benefits of climate actions.

In order to change the way the city works together, Malmö has implemented a range of tools and approaches that focus on localizing climate equity to the district level while driving internal systems change across the city. This includes finding new opportunities to attach their collective work to climate and equity, such as thematic partnerships like the 'Malmö Commitment'[27] or targeted measures like urban greenery, which is then grounded in each department's expertise. To overcome traditional government structures, the city uses integrative strategies like power redistribution, future-making tools, roadmaps, and problem-solving sessions within thematic committees. Instruments like the Discomfort Index further support this work by revealing how climate impacts intersect with everyday issues such as housing, health, economy, and gender, helping departments build a shared understanding and coordinate more effectively around climate justice.[28]

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Meaningful inter-departmental collaboration is possible when equity is localized, systems change is prioritized, and flexible, integrative tools are used to build shared understanding across departments and connect climate action to everyday social realities.

26 Viable Cities and City of Malmö (2021), p. 6.
27 ICLEI and City of Malmö, Website.
28 Adaptation AGORA (2024).



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Building internal capacity for equitable climate action

As outcomes of the INCLU:DE project, both Bonn and Dortmund are planning targeted workshops to strengthen internal capacity and raise awareness about equity considerations across climate-related work.

In **Bonn**, a planned workshop series for municipal staff will aim to focus on making social justice a standard consideration across all climate-initiatives. The workshops will be open to staff involved in the development and implementation of the city's climate plan, including climate protection coordinators, specialist departments, and project managers.

The two-part structure begins with introducing the general principles of social justice in climate action, exploring its importance and the dangers of neglecting it, as well as a needs assessment survey to identify relevant equity-related challenges in Bonn. This will allow the second meeting to delve further into topic specificities, focusing on practical and implementation-oriented content and applications, such as preventing green gentrification, addressing land-use conflicts, improving mobility equity, and designing equitable subsidy programs.

In **Dortmund**, the Climate and Energy team will host a workshop with the city's Climate Advisory Board, a body established in 2022 to monitor, support, and advise municipal activities in the field of climate mitigation and adaptation. The aim is to share key project learnings, build a common understanding of equitable climate action, and strengthen cooperation across stakeholders.

Both approaches illustrate how structured, participatory learning spaces can connect diverse perspectives, raise awareness, and empower municipal actors to integrate equity into their own work.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Recognizing how structured, equity-focused workshops can build internal capacity, develop cross-departmental collaboration, and embed social justice into municipal climate planning.

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3.4. Building strategic partnerships with civil society and other key stakeholders

As discussed in ***chapter 2.4***, building long-term partnerships with locally-embedded civil society structures is not only crucial to ensure the inclusiveness but also the effectiveness and efficiency of climate actions, given municipal capacity constraints.

For instance, while care should be taken to not use civil society as a source of unpaid labour, local governments can benefit significantly[29] from the passion, local knowledge, and networks that civil society organizations can bring to collaborative partnerships. These actors enjoy more public trust than governments, corporations, and media, providing decision-makers with insights into local conditions and the specific needs of disadvantaged groups while lending legitimacy to climate governance more broadly.

One key learning from INCLU:DE was the emphasis that **a clear distribution of roles** from the beginning of a project or initiative is essential for ensuring clear expectations, so that different partners understand what is expected of them. Connecting stakeholders can also help to pool knowledge and address issues surrounding complex city processes.

With particular reference to work done at the neighborhood or district level, it is best to **seek out 'change-makers'**. In other words, those who are particularly motivated and well-connected, and therefore, successful at encouraging others to become involved. In addition, buy-in can be effectively secured by linking these tasks to a partner's day-to-day work, showcasing how these can contribute to the same outcomes (rather than producing additional work).

It is important that such partnerships are embedded into city working structures, so that future projects and climate action plans incorporate this approach. At the start, this might involve a kick-off workshop and mapping of tasks and responsibilities, development and sharing of operational plans, etc. In the longer-term, regular check-ins and the use of digital tools can support monitoring of updates per partner (*see the example of Ludwigsburg's digital workflow from* ***chapter 2.3***).

29 Strid et al. (2023), p. 5.

Collaboration with locally embedded multipliers

Both Bonn and Heidelberg have taken steps to work directly with trusted local civil society actors to increase relevance of their climate actions to target group needs and to lay the groundwork for lasting collaboration.

In **Bonn**, the city's 'climate districts' (see ***introduction*** →) are centrally coordinated by the 'KompetenzNetz', a structure that brings together key actors from both civil society and the municipality. Crucially, however, each individual climate district consists of a physical space led by a trusted civil society actor. These organizations act as multipliers, using their networks, credibility, and knowledge of local dynamics to anchor climate action in community priorities. This ensures that activities are not only technically sound but also socially attuned to the realities of the neighborhood's residents.

In **Heidelberg**, efforts to increase applications for balcony solar subsidies from underrepresented city districts have similarly relied on local structures. The city first tested and refined its outreach plans through discussions with the Hasenleiser Procurement Advisory Board, a group of elected local residents who give input to the city on the investments to be made in their district.

In both cities, this approach helps to leverage existing community relationships and ensures that engagement strategies are informed by local knowledge and networks, rather than solely by the perspectives of city officials. By working through established community actors, municipalities can connect more authentically with residents, improve program uptake, and foster longer-term cooperation.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Collaboration with trusted local civil society actors can improve the relevance, reach, and long-term impact of municipal climate initiatives by grounding them in community realities.


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3.5. Building enabling framework conditions for socially just climate action

As we have seen in ***chapter 3.1*** →, the design of more socially equitable climate policies can be undermined in various ways by legal regulations, indicating how complex and interdepartmental the task of ensuring socially equitable climate action can be.

Municipalities can **develop internal guidelines** to provide certainty and streamline internal procedures for equitable climate programs, including subsidies. In the case of legal concerns surrounding attempts to simplify the language used in funding guidelines, it will be in the best interest of city officials to include legal departments to co-produce clear guidelines to balance between provision of legal certainty and ensuring greater accessibility for applicants. Similarly, programs should be designed to allow feedback from previous applicants, such as where they learned about the offer or how they experienced the process, while fully complying with data protection regulations.

In other cases, this legal certainty needs to be provided by national authorities. One example is the issue of whether or not climate subsidies are treated as forms of income for the purpose of calculating welfare support, where the national level needs to provide clarity and uniformity.[30]

More generally, the important work by local governments to tailor climate action to local community needs should be **recognized and supported through adequate framework conditions** by integrated funding, shared governance, and local capacity building from national and European policy-makers. INCLU:DE's EU policy paper[31] on *Advancing a Just Urban Transition* highlights a number of key supporting actions here. In the EU, the upcoming Social Climate Fund is one key funding instrument that can be leveraged to promote equitable climate action at the local level Furthermore, to support localized and contextualized transition leadership, access to resources and capacity building is necessary, particularly in the field of participation and co-creation. Finally, by driving systems for regular monitoring and public reporting on social justice, outcomes in climate transitions can be afforded transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

Nonetheless, operating within existing public funding constraints, cities are finding increasingly innovative ways to ensure integrated funding for their climate programs. For example, EU-funded projects can provide an important source of funding[32] for cities, if cities can navigate complex application procedures and administrative processes.

Taken together, these experiences illustrate that socially just climate action requires more than just well-designed policies: it depends on a**n enabling framework that spans across legal, financial, and institutional dimensions.** By aligning regulatory clarity, multi-level support and strategic partnerships, municipalities can better navigate complexity and ensure that climate transitions deliver tangible benefits for all. Strengthening these framework conditions is therefore essential to scale and sustain equitable climate action across diverse urban contexts.

30 ICLEI (2024). Chancengleichheit im Klimaschutz, p. 5.
31 ICLEI (2025).
32 ICLEI (2025).

Innovative partnerships for equity in climate action

Several cities show how even in the absence of direct external funding, strategic collaboration and business partnerships can nonetheless build enabling conditions for equitable climate action.

In **Malmö (Sweden)**, partnerships with Malmö University, supported by the national research agency FORMAS, are being used to co-develop a neighbourhood-based model[33] for equitable climate transitions. By linking academic research with local initiatives and social networks, the city is creating a 'living lab' approach where community needs and aspirations shape climate actions. The focus is on reducing emissions while improving the quality of life in lower-income areas, as well as engaging high-income communities to explore necessary sustainable lifestyle changes. This is done by applying an eco-social perspective, to explore how social measures can be driving forces in the climate transition, as well as clarify its potential to be central tools for an inclusive and just transition. Justice aspects and commitments are also addressed through the local climate contract (Klimatkontrakt Malmö)[34], which is based on partnerships with local companies and civic associations.

In **Kaohsiung (Chinese Taipei)**, public-private partnerships have expanded municipal capacity. Working with the YouBike company, the city launched *Kaohsiung YouBike 2.0*, a bike-sharing system with 13,106 bikes and 1,500 stations by 2025, supported by the MeNGo mobility app. The app uses citizen engagement and targeted incentives to help shift residents away from private vehicle-use. This ensures accessibility for underrepresented groups, while urban design audits secure private development contributions for inclusive mobility infrastructure.

In **Eeklo (Belgium)**, equity is integrated into municipal tenders and spatial planning initiatives related to energy, including wind, solar, and district heating. Additionally, part of the revenue is set aside and reinvested into new energy projects and in supporting the energy community. This includes assistance for social workers in local engagement and guidance, and enabling lower-income households to benefit from local renewable energy generation through lease-lending cooperative shares. Bundling small projects for commercial investment and citizen crowdfunding helps to further reduce entry barriers, distribute benefits locally, and create democratic ownership of the energy transition.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Strategic collaborations with academic, private, and community partners can expand municipal capacity, unlock and diversify resources, and embed equity - ensuring that climate action delivers both social and environmental benefits.

33 City of Malmö and NetZeroCities. (2023), p. 42-43.
34 City of Malmö, Website.

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Conclusion and outlook: What empowerment means for equitable climate action in cities

All five INCLU:DE cities began their journey with an open mind, exploring ways to strengthen the equity focus of their various climate initiatives. This involved questioning assumptions and unpacking what equity means in both theory and practice. Along the way, we learned that equitable climate action requires a shift from incentive-driven approaches toward an *empowerment* logic. This shift means actively including local communities and understanding how they can best benefit from climate-friendly options and technologies, and creating opportunities for them to lead in shaping local action.

From the diversity of examples from project cities and their efforts to make climate action more equitable and inclusive, what is it that makes these activities stand out? It is the commitment to making programs truly inclusive by working closely with disadvantaged and underserved populations, as well as basing decisions on their actual needs instead of assumptions and stereotypes. It is the commitment to understanding and addressing accessibility barriers that hinder those groups from participating in, and benefitting from, municipal programs. It is the commitment to institutionalizing these efforts across the administration, ensuring alignment of climate and equity goals and a culture of learning and refinement.

A key ingredient here is ***ongoing* collaboration**. Collaboration with local residents and communities, with technical and academic stakeholders, and with relevant departments and colleagues within the municipality, where climate, housing, health, and social services often operate in silos. Firstly, **engaging local communities** is a good basis on which to build trust, as it ensures that climate policies are reflective of their lived experiences, knowledge, and motivations. Ideally, such efforts lead to community empowerment by creating conditions for them to lead and shape solutions themselves, with the city taking on a supporting rather than leading role.

Secondly, when developing concrete programs, a range of specific measures can be taken to **ensure more equitable design**, such as simplifying application processes and allocating dedicated funding for specific demographic or geographic groups. Equitable climate action requires a deep understanding of resident's everyday realities and the cultural contexts that shape how they perceive and engage with climate issues. Climate departments often have limited insights into local demographics and the barriers faced by disadvantaged groups. Accordingly, this work may require taking a step back to conduct baseline studies, engage with social welfare departments, and listen to diverse local

perspectives. Here, it can be helpful to create space for dialogue and work with local actors to bridge social and linguistic gaps. While this requires time and effort, these measures not only improve direct communication with target groups but also create avenues to institutionalize feedback and ensure ongoing participation in program updates.

Thirdly, by **institutionalizing equitable climate action** across the municipality, city officials allow future climate programs to build on existing social equity learnings and successful processes. Such efforts to align equity and climate goals involve recognizing and addressing institutional barriers within the administration, including legal, administrative, financial, and resource-related challenges. Solutions include fostering interdepartmental collaboration and strengthening internal capacity to reduce silos.

In times of financial and political difficulties, we have seen how adopting a holistic perspective can make a real difference. Emission reductions should not be considered in isolation, as this can lead to unintended consequences that undermine the goals of equitable climate action. By **emphasizing other benefits of climate programs** such as cleaner air, safer public spaces, or lower energy bills, we can increase equity outcomes, improve public support and argue for long-term investment. Crucially, this requires clear narratives that highlight the value of making climate action inclusive of all social groups, thereby strengthening democratic resilience and supporting the long-term societal transformation we need.

Looking ahead, the financial situation in many cities in Germany and around the world remains challenging. Meanwhile, political momentum in many cases is stagnating or even reversing. This makes it difficult to sustain and scale up equitable climate action without strong allies and additional support. Continued funding, capacity-building, and policy alignment at national and state levels will be essential to empower municipalities in this work. What unites us in the INCLU:DE project is a joint vision to make cities fairer, healthier, and more liveable - for and with the people who need this the most.

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ANNEX

About the INCLU:DE project

INCLU:DE - Socially just climate action in German cities is implemented by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability and supported by Stiftung Mercator. The project supports local climate measures and fosters dialogue exchanges to better understand what it needs to generate positive equity outcomes for local residents. A specific emphasis is placed on addressing challenges like fair and equitable resource distribution and benefits allocation, while ensuring that GHG reduction goals are not being compromised.

Socially just climate measures in INCLU:DE cities

The cities of Bonn, Heidelberg, Ludwigsburg, Dortmund and Essen have joined the INCLU:DE project to improve social justice considerations in their local climate initiatives. Collaboration with international frontrunner cities Almada, Kaohsiung, Malmö, Rosario, and San José in the field of just and inclusive climate action ensures that best practices can be mainstreamed across local governments.

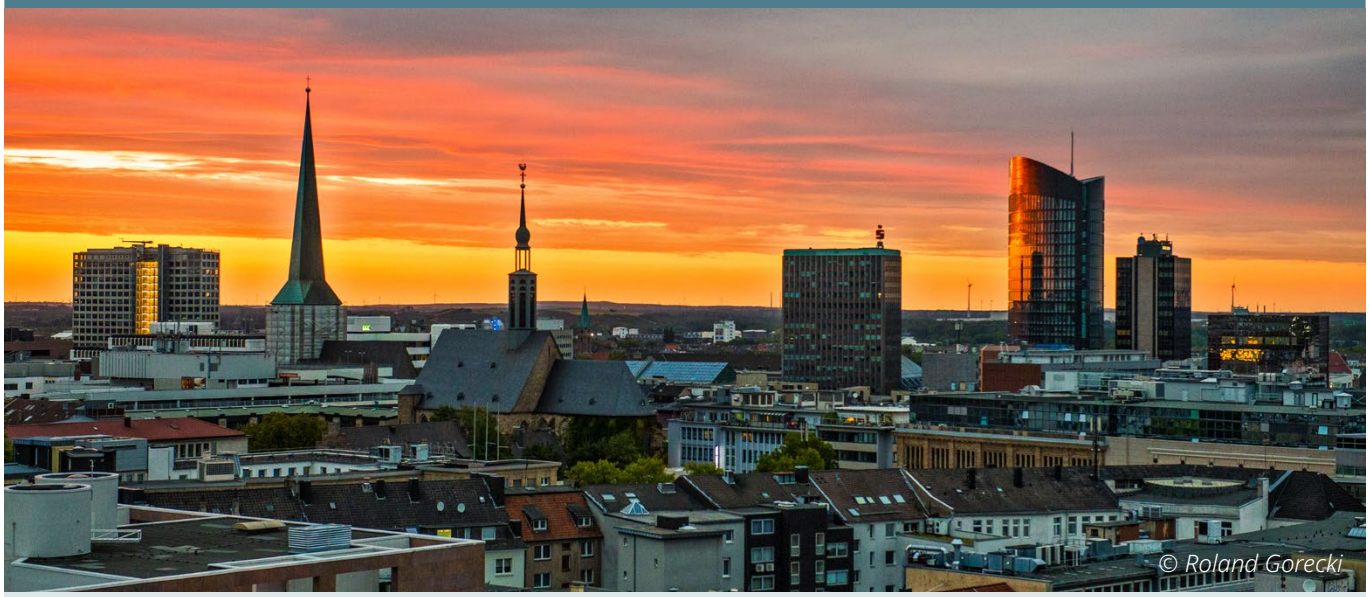
More information is available on the INCLU:DE website.

Mainstreaming social equity in climate action: The INCLU:DE city profiles

The following profiles showcase how five German cities - Bonn, Dortmund, Essen, Heidelberg, and Ludwigsburg - are reimagining climate action through the lens of social equity.

As participants in the INCLU:DE project, these municipalities have developed diverse climate actions ranging from solar energy programs and climate neighborhoods to sustainable mobility initiatives. Each profile highlights the specific actions taken, the support measures implemented to ensure that these initiatives reach all community members, and the (future) systematic integration of social justice considerations into broader municipal operations. These experiences demonstrate how cities can embed equity principles into climate policy frameworks, ensuring that the transition to climate neutrality benefits everyone while creating lasting institutional change.

CITY OF DORTMUND • INCLUSIVE SOLAR ENERGY ACCESS FOR ALL



In 2021, the City of Dortmund launched its 'Immediate Climate Program' as part of the broader Action Program Climate-Air 2030, contributing to the city's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2035. A key component was establishing a funding scheme for plug-in balcony solar devices, designed to engage apartment-dwelling citizens in climate protection and clean energy supply. The city allocated 200,000€ for this subsidy program, which began in November 2023, offering financial incentives and advisory services to facilitate low-income household participation in the energy transition. Citizens could apply for single (400W) or double installations (800W), which provide sufficient energy for standby appliances or power devices like hairdryers. The program featured a tiered subsidy structure with standard applicants receiving 50% cost coverage (max. 500€), while social welfare recipients could claim up to 95% of costs, ensuring energy transition accessibility for vulnerable households.

SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

Through the INCLU:DE project, Dortmund developed comprehensive support measures to make the subsidy program more equitable and accessible, focusing on optimizing funding structures and strengthening communication strategies for low-income households:

- **Accessibility Enhancement:** The city integrated a questionnaire into application forms to evaluate participants' experiences with program communication and access to relevant information. The website was translated using an automated web plugin, making it accessible in 13 languages including English, Turkish, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Chinese.

- **Plain Language Initiative:** Recognizing language barriers as significant obstacles, Dortmund conducted a feasibility assessment for implementing plain language as citizen-oriented administrative language for websites and application documents. Staff undertook internal workshops on 'citizen-oriented administrative language' to improve communication with residents struggling with complex bureaucratic terminology.

- **Baseline Study Development:** In collaboration with the University for Applied Sciences of Dortmund, a comprehensive baseline study is being developed to create practical criteria for future subsidies, transferring general INCLU:DE insights to the Dortmund context. This analysis examines

demographics and their specific needs while identifying opportunities for enhanced engagement with underrepresented groups.

MUNICIPAL UPTAKE MEASURES

Dortmund's approach represents systematic efforts to embed equity considerations into ongoing municipal operations through institutional learning and policy integration:

- **Systematic Integration:** Dortmund is developing a comprehensive checklist for funding programs that will systematically ensure social justice criteria are integrated into all future subsidy schemes. This tool creates institutional consistency in applying equity principles across different departments and programs, e.g. making information accessible to new staff members.

- **Advisory Board Engagement:** Plans are underway for a workshop on social justice with the Climate Advisory Board, ensuring that equity considerations remain central to climate policy discussions and decision-making processes.

- **Political Integration:** The city plans to feed project results into the political level through the City Council, ensuring that lessons learned influence broader municipal climate policy and resource allocation decisions.

The city's experience demonstrates that meaningful participation in the energy transition requires more than financial incentives alone. Effective outreach, simplified administrative processes, and targeted support for vulnerable populations are essential components of equitable climate policy.

CITY OF HEIDELBERG • NEIGHBORHOOD-FOCUSED SOLAR ACCESS IN HASENLEISER

Heidelberg's climate measure for INCLU:DE focuses on enhancing access for low-income households to its balcony solar module subsidy scheme, which is part of the overarching 'Efficient Use of Energy Subsidy Program'. The initiative specifically targeted the Hasenleiser district, which is faced with a high percentage of unemployment and residents with low socio-economic status and migration backgrounds compared to other areas. The neighborhood consists primarily of multi-family apartment buildings constructed in the 1970s, with few renovations since. The area has significant energy savings potential, with possible CO_2 emissions reduction of 96% through solar panel installation, district heating, and building refurbishment. Under Heidelberg's 'Efficient Use of Energy Subsidy Program', holders of the Heidelberg-Card and Heidelberg-Card Plus only paid 50€ for balcony solar modules, but needed to cover upfront costs and await reimbursement approval, which created financial barriers for struggling households.

Heidelberg's approach centered on the socially equitable design and target group-oriented communication of the balcony solar funding program in Hasenleiser. The city recognizes that beyond financial barriers, challenges include low awareness of balcony solar technology, insufficient understanding of subsidy programs, low application rates among eligible households for the Heidelberg-Card, and requirements for written landlord approval. The neighborhood-focused strategy acknowledges that effective climate action must address economic, cultural, and educational aspects simultaneously, ensuring that technical solutions are accessible and relevant to diverse communities with varying levels of familiarity with renewable energy technologies.

SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

Through the INCLU:DE project, Heidelberg has developed comprehensive measures to enhance program accessibility and community engagement in the Hasenleiser district:

- **Demonstration Modules:** The city makes photovoltaics, balcony solar systems, and subsidies more tangible through demonstration modules installed in public places and high-visibility locations. These physical examples help residents understand the technology's function and benefits while normalizing solar installation in the neighborhood context.

- **Community Event Integration:** Heidelberg builds on existing events in the target neighborhood, including the 'HalliGalli Festival', to reach residents through familiar community gatherings rather than creating separate outreach activities that might not attract the intended audience.

- **Local Multiplier Engagement:** The city conducted surveys of local multipliers, particularly the Hasenleiser Advisory Board, to identify the most suitable next steps and actions relevant to the target group. This approach leverages existing community relationships and ensures that outreach strategies are informed by local knowledge and trust networks.

- **Plain Language Communication:** New flyers have been designed to explain the function and benefits of balcony solar systems in plain language, removing technical jargon that might prevent residents from understanding available opportunities. A related communication campaign is planned for summer 2025 to systematically disseminate information throughout the district.

MUNICIPAL UPTAKE MEASURES

Heidelberg is developing systematic approaches to improve future funding program design and community engagement that will be implemented going forward:

- **Finding Synergies:** The city plans to identify opportunities for joint promotion of various funding programs, creating comprehensive information packages that address multiple household needs simultaneously rather than promoting individual programs in isolation.

- **Funding Program Guidelines:** Heidelberg plans to develop guidelines for future funding program development, including recommendations to eliminate upfront payment requirements from applicants. The Social Services Department will provide input on effective target group outreach and engagement strategies, with recommendations potentially extending to the political level through the committees.

- **Enhanced Civil Society Collaboration:** Plans include more effective work with civil society organizations and social services, beginning with establishing contact lists of relevant organizations and individuals to include from early stages of future funding program development, ensuring community perspectives inform program design from the outset.

- **Public Infrastructure:** The city plans to set up public benches with attached demonstration solar modules and information displays, creating permanent educational infrastructure that normalizes solar technology while providing ongoing community education opportunities.

CITY OF LUDWIGSBURG • CAREFREE CLIMATE SOLUTIONS FOR LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

In alignment with the United Nations' Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Leipzig Charter, the City of Ludwigsburg is dedicated to reducing carbon emissions and driving the energy transition to attain climate neutrality by 2035. As part of its climate protection efforts, Ludwigsburg launched the 'Climate Bonus' program in 2022, offering subsidies for climate-friendly housing with 350,000€ allocated for this purpose. The program was tailored to homeowners and tenants while integrating the needs of social welfare recipients. Through INCLU:DE, the city focused on two tenant-focused measures: subsidies for plug-in solar devices and the replacement of energy-inefficient cooling systems. Social welfare recipients were eligible for subsidies of up to 100€ for new cooling devices, while other tenants could apply for a 300€ subsidy for plug-in solar modules.

Ludwigsburg's approach centered on the socially equitable design of the municipal 'Climate Bonus' funding program, featuring an innovative service for plug-in solar devices. For social welfare recipients holding the Ludwigsburg-Card (LB-Card) - which provides city-wide discounts on educational and cultural institutions for low-income residents - the city offered its solar subsidy as a comprehensive 'carefree package'. This innovative approach allowed applicants to simply indicate their interest while the city directly coordinates purchase and installation of the device. The package covered all service and installation costs totaling 1,450€, rendering the device completely free of charge and ensuring no money transfer was required from applicants. This eliminated financial barriers and administrative complexities that often prevent vulnerable households from accessing climate protection measures.

SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

Through the INCLU:DE project, Ludwigsburg has implemented comprehensive measures to enhance program accessibility and community engagement:

- **Communication materials development:** The city designed new flyers and updated the Ludwigsburg homepage using plain language, developed in consultation with ICLEI and the city's Integration Council to ensure materials are accessible to diverse communities and non-native German speakers.

- **Local multiplier collaboration:** Strategic planning and identification of cooperation partners has enabled promotion during solar consultation sessions and other local events. This approach leverages

trusted community relationships to reach households who might not otherwise learn about available programs through traditional municipal communication channels.

- **Targeted promotion strategies:** The city implemented direct outreach through emails to LB-Card holders and included program offers in the LB-Card voucher booklet, ensuring information reaches low-income residents through channels they already use. Plans for summer 2025 include a public transport advertising campaign following ICLEI guidelines on target group-oriented communication.

MUNICIPAL UPTAKE MEASURES

Ludwigsburg is developing systematic approaches to embed social equity considerations into broader municipal planning and policy frameworks:

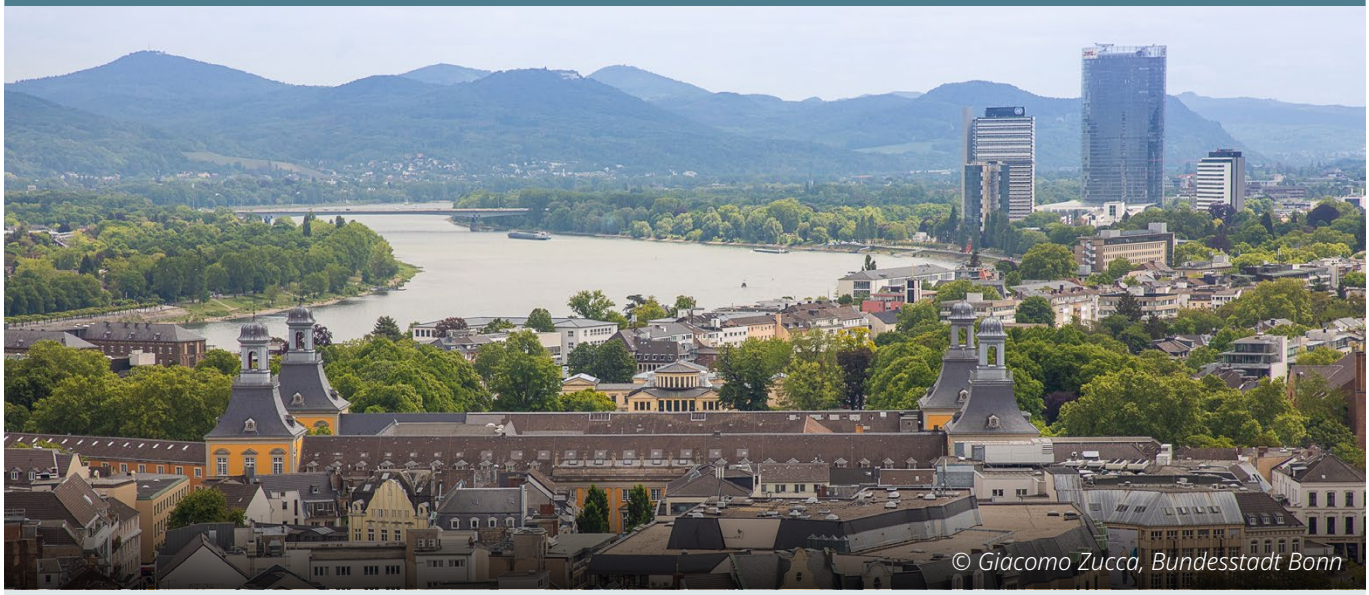
- **Urban development integration:** The city plans to use INCLU:DE insights to frame socially just climate action within its Urban Development Concept, strategically integrating social cohesion and climate neutrality as complementary municipal objectives rather than competing priorities.

- **Community testimonials:** Plans include featuring testimonials from past LB-Card balcony solar recipients, including promoting milestone achievements like the 100th PV module installation through media and public outreach to demonstrate program success and encourage broader participation.

- **Enhanced multiplier engagement:** The city will increase engagement with multipliers and civil society organizations through events like solar parties and dedicated awareness-raising sessions for community partners, building capacity among trusted intermediaries to expand program reach.

- **Political integration:** Ludwigsburg plans to present this INCLU:DE guidebook as a formal report to the City Council, ensuring that project learnings influence broader municipal climate policy and resource allocation decisions while creating institutional commitment to inclusive climate action principles.

CITY OF BONN • CLIMATE NEIGHBORHOODS AS INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY HUBS



In March 2023, Bonn's 'Climate Plan 2035' was approved, emphasizing collective effort from municipal, individual, and business actors to achieve climate neutrality by 2035. A key innovation is the development of four climate neighborhoods designed to inspire climate-friendly lifestyle changes through opportunities for innovation, networking, consultation, and education. Each climate neighborhood features a physical space as a central contact point while connecting with existing structures and collaborating with civil society initiatives. The first neighborhood (Beuel-Mitte) partners with a consortium around the 'Brotfabrik' cultural center, while the second (Godesberg-Nord) leverages district management synergies. Two additional neighborhoods in Hardtberg and central Bonn received approval in June 2024. The active and expanding program represents Bonn's commitment to socially equitable climate action, ensuring initiatives are accessible to diverse population groups. Each serves as a catalyst for community-driven climate action while addressing specific local needs. The approach creates networks between existing community structures, civil society organizations, and residents, democratizing climate action regardless of socioeconomic background or previous environmental engagement. A dedicated steering group established in mid-2024 provides strategic guidance and facilitates knowledge transfer between neighborhoods, ensuring successful approaches can be adapted citywide.

SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

Through the INCLU:DE project, Bonn has implemented several measures to ensure social equity considerations are integrated into the climate neighborhoods' design and implementation:

- **Expert input on pilot concepts:** ICLEI provided input through a 'social equity lens' on pilot project concepts, based on the established Equity Framework. This technical assistance resulted in concrete improvements, with two out of three commented profiles already having been implemented. They incorporate the recommended modifications, demonstrating the practical value of external expertise in enhancing program accessibility.

- **Workshop on social justice:** A comprehensive workshop on social justice was conducted with the aforementioned steering group responsible for coordinating the climate neighborhoods, building internal capacity for equity-centered decision-making and program design.

- **Peer city exchange:** Regular exchange meetings between Bonn's core team and peer cities, including Rosario, have facilitated international knowledge sharing and provided opportunities to learn from similar initiatives in different contexts, enriching the local approach with global perspectives on inclusive climate action.

MUNICIPAL UPTAKE MEASURES

Bonn is developing systematic approaches to embed social justice considerations into its broader climate governance framework. The city plans to introduce a new 'profile' titled 'Social Justice & Participation' within Bonn's Work Programme for implementing the Climate Plan, featuring two concrete implementation measures:

- **Capacity building workshop series:** Internal capacity building will be strengthened through planned workshop series for municipal staff on socially just climate action, covering both general principles and challenge-specific applications to ensure that equity considerations become standard practice across all climate-related initiatives.

- **Social justice checklist:** A comprehensive checklist for integrating social justice aspects into each Climate Plan action area is being developed, providing topic-specific guidance that will systematize equity considerations across all municipal climate activities, ensuring consistent application of social justice principles throughout Bonn's climate policy implementation.

CITY OF ESSEN • EQUITABLE MOBILITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE CARGO BIKE PROGRAMS

The City of Essen is developing its 'Mobility Plan 2035' with the ambitious objective of shifting the city's modal split away from private car dependency, aiming for 75% of trips to be made using sustainable transport options including public transport, walking, and cycling. As part of this transformation, Essen launched an extensive cargo bike program featuring two complementary components: a municipal subsidy scheme offering residents up to 800€ or 20% of purchase costs for cargo bikes and bike trailers, as well as an upcoming public cargo bike sharing system throughout the city. Essen's approach centered on the socially equitable design of new funding guidelines for cargo bikes combined with targeted communication strategies for the funding program. This comprehensive approach included developing evaluation mechanisms to assess both program accessibility and effectiveness in reaching diverse population groups. The city recognized that sustainable mobility transitions must be inclusive to be successful, ensuring that economic barriers do not prevent low-income households from participating in climate-friendly transportation alternatives. The cargo bike initiative represented a practical solution for families and individuals seeking alternatives to car ownership while addressing logistical challenges in urban environments.

SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

Through the INCLU:DE project, Essen has implemented several measures to enhance the social equity of its cargo bike initiatives:

- **Funding criteria revision:** The city has undertaken a comprehensive revision of funding criteria with explicit focus on increasing social equity. Key improvements include introducing family and social bonuses providing up to 1,200€ for recipients of social benefits, alongside full digitalization of the application process to reduce administrative barriers and improve accessibility for all applicants.

- **Public survey implementation:** Essen conducted evaluative surveys to assess funding program needs and identify areas for improvement, gathering quantitative and qualitative data on applicant motivations, barriers to participation, and community perceptions of cargo bike usage among different demographic groups.

- **Strategic communication:** The city explored disseminating communication materials through daycare centers, schools, and public events to reach families and community members who might not otherwise learn about funding opportunities through traditional municipal communication channels.

- **Research for guidelines enhancement:** Comprehensive research was conducted to support the revision of funding guidelines, drawing on experiences from other German cities including Duisburg and Düsseldorf, as well as international pioneer cities like Grenoble and Medellín, to identify best practices for income-based grant stratification and inclusive program design.

MUNICIPAL UPTAKE MEASURES

Essen is developing systematic approaches to improve program accessibility and community engagement that will be implemented in the future:

- **Improving access to information:** The city plans to build synergies and bundle knowledge of different municipal offers and programs while providing multilingual information in strategic locations throughout the city, ensuring that language barriers do not prevent residents from accessing available support.

- **Community outreach and low-threshold consultation:** Plans include deploying mobile 'one-stop-shops' for regular neighborhood presence, bringing services directly to communities rather than requiring residents to navigate complex municipal bureaucracies to access information and support.

- **Visibility through multipliers:** The city will make funding programs more visible through trusted community multipliers. This involves existing social infrastructure and cooperating with civil society organizations and neighborhood management officials to create snowball effects that expand program awareness through established community networks and relationships.

List of case studies and links

1. **Comprehensive example: Strategically strengthening social justice in community climate action through local engagement spaces.**
   City of Bonn, Germany | ***p. 9***

   - **Bonn's 'Climate Districts' initiative:** https://www.bonn.de/themen-entdecken/klima/klimaplan/klimaviertel.php?form=translationDisclaimer-MTUxMjYyMg&action=submit#translationDisclaimer-MTUxMjYyMg

2. **Data-driven approaches for identifying and improving community needs.**
   City of Dortmund, Germany • City of Essen, Germany • City of San José, United States | ***p. 14***

   - **Essen's cargo bike subsidy program:** https://www.essen.de/leben/umwelt/nachhaltigkeit/lastenradfoerderung.de.html
   - **Dortmund's 'GRUND:KLIMA' baseline study:** https://www.fh-dortmund.de/microsite/nachhaltigkeit/forschung/projekt-grund-klima.php?loc=en-US
   - **California's mapping tool 'CalEnviroScreen':** https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen
   - **San José's 'Zero Emissions Neighborhood' program:** https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/energy/climate-smart-san-jose/zero-emissions-neighborhood-zen-pilot

3. **Inclusive communication campaigns for local climate programs.**
   City of Heidelberg • City of Ludwigsburg, Germany | ***p. 17***

4. **Enabling participation through community engagement in the Hasenleiser District.**
   City of Heidelberg, Germany | ***p. 18***

   - **Heidelberg's 'Efficient Use of Energy' subsidy program:** https://www.heidelberg.de/HD/Leben/Foerderprogramm+Rationelle+Energieverwendung.html

5. **Elevating local voices in climate decision-making.**
   City of Bristol, United Kingdom | ***p. 21***

   - **Bristol Climate and Nature Partnership, Community Climate Action Project:** https://bristolclimatenature.org/projects/community-climate-action/
   - **Bristol Climate and Nature Partnership, Community Climate and Nature Action Model:** https://bristolclimatenature.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/295-BCNP-CCA-Project-Model-Narrative-WEB.pdf
   - **Bristol Climate and Nature Partnership, Community Leadership Panel:** https://bristolclimatenature.org/projects/community-climate-action/community-leadership-panel/

6. **Conceptualizing the Austin Climate Equity Plan in an inclusive way.**
City of Austin, USA | ***p. 26***

   - **City of Austin's Climate Equity Plan:** https://www.austintexas.gov/page/austin-climate-equity-plan

7. **Grassroots solar adoption in Bonn fueled by balcony scouts.**
City of Bonn, Germany | ***p. 29***

   - **Bonn Climate Plan 2035:** https://www.bonn.de/themen-entdecken/klima/klimaplan/bonn-klimaneutral-2035.php?loc=en#:~:text=To%20become%20climate%2Dneutral%20in,of%2093%25%20compared%20to%202020

   - **Bonn as 'balcony power plant capital':** https://www.bonn.de/pressemitteilungen/september-2024/klimaschutz-und-soziale-gerechtigkeit-balkonkraftwerke-sind-in-bonn-beliebt.php

   - **Bonn's 'Balcony scouts' training program:** https://www.bonn.de/pressemitteilungen/januar/solarausbau-jetzt-balkonscout-fuer-die-nachbarschaft-werden.php?loc=en

8. **Revising funding guideline to improve effectiveness of financial support.**
City of Essen, Germany | ***p. 30***

   - **City of Essen's cargo bike subsidy program:** https://www.essen.de/leben/umwelt/nachhaltigkeit/lastenradfoerderung.de.html

9. **Centering lived experience in climate program design through its Community Advisory Board.**
City of San José, USA | ***p. 32***

10. **Innovating municipal systems for inclusive climate solutions.**
City of Ludwigsburg, Germany | ***p. 33***

11. **Community-led programs for addressing energy poverty.**
Lumiar Civil Parish, Lisbon, Portugal | ***p. 35***

   - **European Commission's Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH):** https://energy-poverty.ec.europa.eu/

   - **Telheiras/Lumiar's Citizen-led Renewable Energy Initiative:** https://fireflyenergylab.com/research/publications/107

12. **Sharing project outcomes with city councils to secure political support.**
City of Dortmund • City of Ludwigsburg, Germany | ***p. 41***

13. **Inter-Departmental Collaboration for a Just Transition.**
City of Malmö, Sweden | ***p. 44***

   - **Malmö's Climate Transition Team:** https://viablecities.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Climate_City_Contract_2030_ENG_Malmo.pdf

   - **The Malmö Commitment:** https://malmo-commitment.org/

14. **Building internal capacity for equitable climate action.**
City of Bonn • City of Dortmund, Germany | ***p. 45***

15. **Collaboration with Locally Embedded Multipliers.**
City of Bonn • City of Heidelberg, Germany | ***p. 47***

16. **Innovative Partnerships for Equity in Climate Action.**
City of Malmö, Sweden • City of Kaohsiung, Taiwan/Chinese Taipei • City of Eeklo, Belgium | ***p. 49***

- **2030 Climate Neutrality Action Plan of Malmö:** https://netzerocities.app/_content/files/knowledge/4189/malmo_nzc_ccc_ok.pdf

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