

INCLU:DE case studies

City of Dortmund: Research-grounded inclusive climate subsidy programs

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 low-income 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 to address 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.

- **GRUND:KLIMA baseline study:** In collaboration with the University for Applied Sciences of Dortmund, a comprehensive baseline study has been conducted to examine how municipal climate subsidies can be designed more equitably and inclusively in the Dortmund context. The GRUND:KLIMA study highlights socio-spatial aspects of disadvantage in the city, while identifying opportunities for enhanced engagement with underrepresented groups. As a result, the study provides tailored recommendations based on the INCLU:DE [Climate Equity Toolbox](#) and a hands-on checklist to ensure equity and social inclusion are systematically considered when planning, implementing and evaluating future climate subsidy programs in the city of Dortmund.

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:** Through the GRUND:KLIMA study, Dortmund has received a comprehensive checklist for funding programs that will help to systematically integrate equity and justice criteria into future climate and energy related subsidy schemes. This tool creates institutional consistency in applying equity principles across different departments and programs. These insights will also be included in guidelines for new staff members in the Environment Agency.
- **Political integration:** The city will share the project results, including the GRUND:KLIMA study, with the City Council so that lessons learned can guide broader municipal climate policy and resource allocation. The study results will also be presented and discussed in Dortmund's Climate Advisory Board.
- **Workshop on citizen-oriented administrative language:** A regular workshop on citizen-oriented administrative language is offered as part of Dortmund's training program. Targeted at colleagues working with funding programs and/or in citizen-facing roles, it is especially recommended for new staff to ensure clear, inclusive communication in climate action that also addresses underrepresented groups.

