

INCLU:DE case studies

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 CO₂ 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.
- **Public Infrastructure:** The city has set up a public bench called a "SolarTankBank" with attached demonstration solar modules and information displays. This creates permanent educational infrastructure that normalizes solar technology while providing shade, a place to sit, and the ability to charge your phone, inviting passersby to recharge both themselves and their devices.

Municipal uptake measures

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



- **Expansion of the balcony solar campaign:** From Spring 2026 the city plans to expand the campaign from the Hasenleiser district to the Boxberg neighborhood. The INCLU:DE project's approach is helpful in giving space to the topic of socially equitable climate protection, particularly by drawing on the networks and trust of the district management in activities such as balcony solar training. To support these activities, planning currently envisions providing a balcony solar device to Boxberg district management.
- **Showcase balcony solar module:** With the new Hasenleiser district management premises opening in 2026, the installation of a showcase balcony solar module will serve as a physical example to help residents understand the technology's function and benefits, while further normalizing solar installations in the neighborhood context.
- **Updating Climate City Contract in the context of the EU Cities Mission:** The update of the Climate City Contract in late 2026 will draw on and highlight a number of concrete implementation activities from the INCLU:DE project. These will include balcony PV support, solar benches set-up, and the establishment of neighborhood-level networks. In addition, social equity will be strengthened as a cross-cutting theme and transferred to other programs and projects.
- **Drawing on INCLU:DE insights for planned energy-efficient neighborhood renovation work:** The city plans to apply for federal funding under the KfW program 432, which would run from 2027 to 2029. The insights from INCLU:DE can be applied here to support strategic communication and engagement of housing associations and homeowner associations, to reduce barriers for tenants, etc.

