



EUROPEAN UNION



EU MISSIONS

ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE



June 2024

“Heat Telephone Parasol”

Volunteers informing the elderly about current heat hazards in Kassel, Germany

This initiative started in 2010 and is part of a cross-disciplinary project to ensure close cooperation between science, business, social groups and political decision-makers for climate adaptation.

Key Learnings

- **Informing and preventing:** As warming temperatures especially threaten vulnerable groups like the elderly, the heat telephone was introduced as an information tool for prevention.
- **Simple and effective:** A simple telephone call can make a difference. Providing brief information about heat warnings has proven effective in reaching the vulnerable group. By making personal contact, other needs and worries are often revealed. The elderly highly value the personal aspect.
- **Volunteering:** This initiative relies on personal commitment and voluntary work of the people calling the elderly. Without the volunteers, this initiative would not be financially viable. The commitment of the same volunteers each year contributes to the success of the Heat telephone and leads a relationship of trust.

About the region

Kassel is located in the federal state of Hessen, Germany. The city of Kassel has 207.622 (2022) inhabitants and approximately 40.800 people are older than 65. The city is in the Kassel Basin and is surrounded by several forests as well as mountain ranges. The climate in the city of Kassel is warmer than in the surrounding mountain landscape. This particularly threatens the elderly population who suffer from climate change-related heat stress and its negative consequences.

Climate Hazards

Extreme Temperatures

Sector

Urban, Health

Key system

Health and Wellbeing

Critical Infrastructure



Climate Threats

Cities like Kassel are particularly exposed to rising temperatures because temperature differences of up to 6°C in the city compared to its surroundings can occur (urban heat island effect). As a result, urban areas need to make special efforts to adapt to increasing temperatures due to climate change. Despite heat stress negatively impacting all of us, heat can pose a serious danger to the elderly without them realising it.

Therefore, the city of Kassel has introduced the initiative¹ “Heat Telephone Parasol”, informing the elderly about upcoming heat in the city and how to protect themselves.

A well-established service

The Seniors’ Advisory Board offers the service, which is the independent body and contact point for all elderly people in the city of Kassel to represent their interests. From June 15th to August 31st, members of the Seniors’ Advisory Board provide free information about all heat warnings at level 2 issued by the German Weather Service for the city of Kassel. Level 2 warnings mean that the perceived temperature rises above 38°C and poses extreme heat stress to the body. After registration, the service is available for the elderly population aged 65 and over.

¹ <https://www.kassel.de/buerger/gesundheit/gesundheitsfoerderung/inhaltsseiten-hitze/hitzetelefon-sonnenschirm.php> (in German)

Besides providing information about impending heat, the Seniors' Advisory Board members give tips on how to protect oneself from excessive heat stress during the phone calls. Those recommendations include:

- Drinking enough fluids
- Seeking shady places during lunchtime
- Airing the house in the early morning

During the phone call, the Seniors' Advisory Board members, who are the volunteers, look out for signs of health issues. If necessary, the volunteers contact the elderly person's responsible general practitioner. Elderly people often underestimate the health risks related to heat. Personal contact makes it possible to identify the personal health risk and determine individual prevention measures. The elderly are contacted by telephone because the over 65-year-olds are still best reachable over the phone, compared to other digital tools (e.g., Apps).

In the long term, the aim is to also reach other vulnerable groups, such as chronically ill and pregnant people or children.

Planning and implementation of the heat telephone

The heat telephone concept dates back to 2010 when the city of Kassel established a set of pilot districts to address urban heating. Those districts were tasked with developing and testing exemplary heat adaptation measures, and at the neighbourhood level, the Heat Prevention Network was founded. Within the Heat Prevention Network, stakeholders collaborate across sectors and disciplines to develop adaptation measures.

As part of the Network, a neighbourhood conference was held in 2010, during which participants discussed climate change and its effect on the elderly population's health. They looked at prevention strategies, the idea of the heat telephone was born, and the concept was further developed. Due to the positive experiences and the broad public feedback, the heat telephone was expanded to the entire city in 2011.

*"Especially the elderly, chronically ill and people requiring care, but also children can be affected by problems due to heat stress in summer, which can be well managed by taking appropriate precautions", Markus Heckenhahn
Coordinator at the Health department Kassel.*

Flexibility, volunteering, and a social aspect characterise the heat telephone

*"Up to date no comparable project exists. The Parasol heat telephone is unique in Germany. The measure can be adapted to [...] weather events on a daily basis and is therefore [...] extremely flexible due to its simple expansion of the offer", Markus Heckenhahn,
Coordinator at the Health department Kassel.*

The basis of the heat telephone are personal commitment and volunteering of the people calling the elderly. The phone is not an open service line and users have to be registered to use it. The Seniors' Advisory Board has an office in the city of Kassel, where the board provides information on events within the seniors' programme, everyday problems and old age during consultation hours. Due to the high level of interest in the heat telephone and commitment of the volunteers, the service is financially viable. Another positive outcome is the social dimension of the service. The often lonely, elderly people have the chance to talk to someone and the initiative results in a social added value.

*"A positive side effect was also the approach and contact with elderly people who live alone and very much welcomed the social contact to the heat telephone staff", Manfred Aul,
Chairman of the Seniors' Advisory Board.*



Figure 1: One of the volunteers who has been part of the initiative since the beginning until today. Image Credit: © Gesundheitsamt Region Kassel.

The evaluation by KLIMZUG-Nordhessen, which is an cross-disciplinary joint project, concluded that the measure successfully helps to warn people in time about extreme heat and consequently prevents serious health issues.

Summary

In 2010, the service of a heat telephone was introduced in Kassel to warn vulnerable groups about dangerous heat waves and related health risks. To date, the initiative has been a success, and the city plans to expand the offer. The service is provided during the two hottest summer months and is a collaboration between the regional health department of Kassel and the Seniors' Advisory Board. Phone calls from volunteers not only prevent the elderly from serious health issues but also address a social aspect.

Further information

The work presented in this adaptation story is part of the "[KLIMZUG-Nordhessen](#)" climate change adaptation network.

Since 1976, the city had a board of Senior citizens' representation. Then, in 1989, the city established a Seniors' Advisory Board comprising 32 elected and delegated members. The board is elected for five years and works voluntarily.

Further reading (in German):

- https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/sites/default/files/medien/364/publikationen/uba_handbuch_gute_praxis_web-bf_0.pdf
- <https://www.kassel.de/buerger/gesundheit/gesundheitsfoerderung/inhaltsseiten-hitze/hitzetelefon-sonnenschirm.php>
- <https://www.kassel.de/gesundheitsamt>

Contact

gesundheitsfoerderung@kassel.de

julia.kretschmer@kassel.de



**Funded by
the European Union**

Disclaimer

This document reflects only the author's view and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Acknowledgement of previously published material and of the work of others has been made through appropriate citation, quotation or both.

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged and the original meaning or message of the document is not distorted.

The European Commission shall not be liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse. The reuse policy of the European Commission documents is implemented by Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

All images © European Union, unless otherwise stated. Image sources: © goodluz, # 25227000, 2021. Source: Stock.Adobe.com. Icons © Flaticon – all rights reserved.