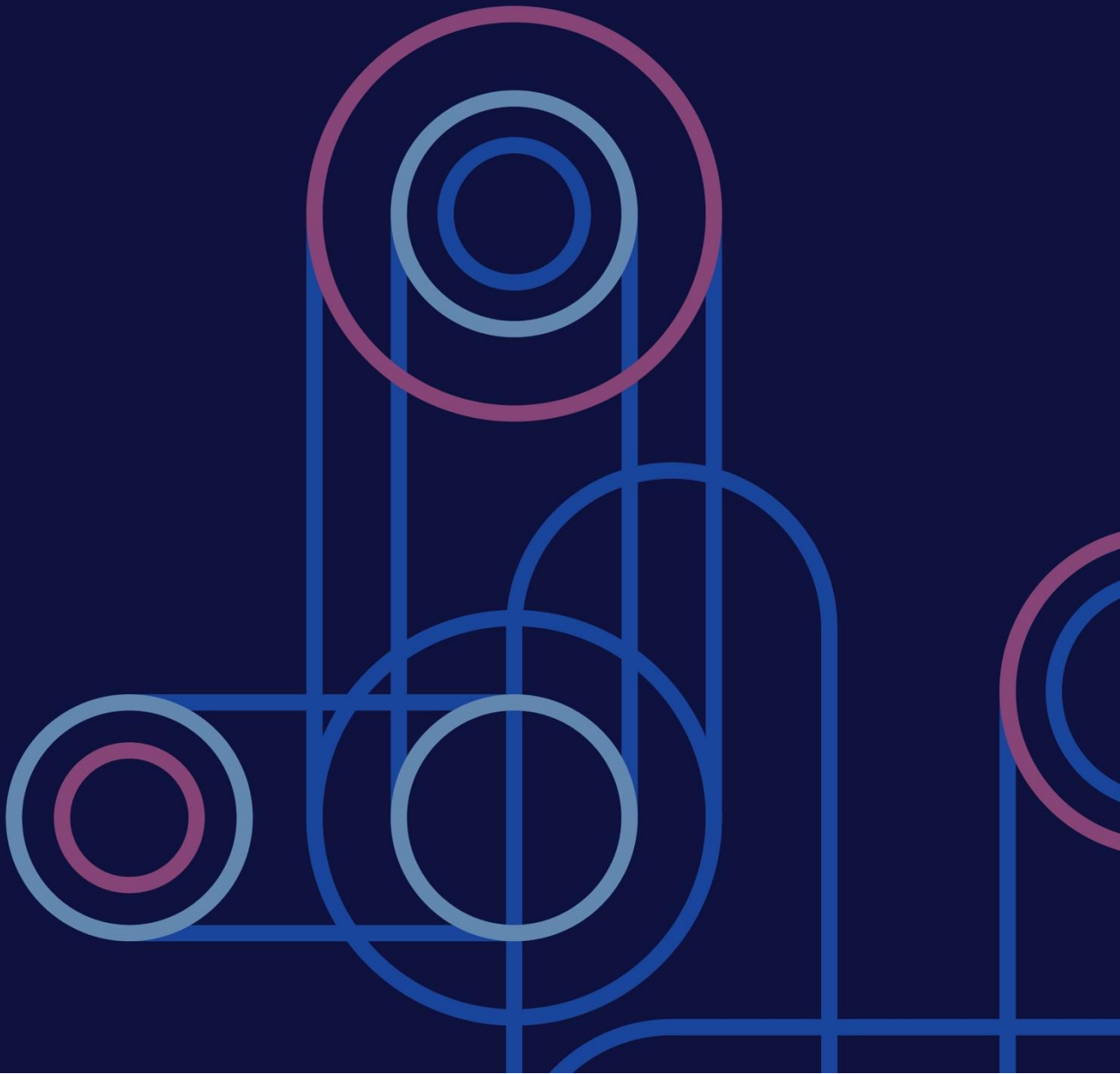


CASE STUDY

*The Coimbra Municipal Health Strategy: an
integrated and place-based plan*

2025

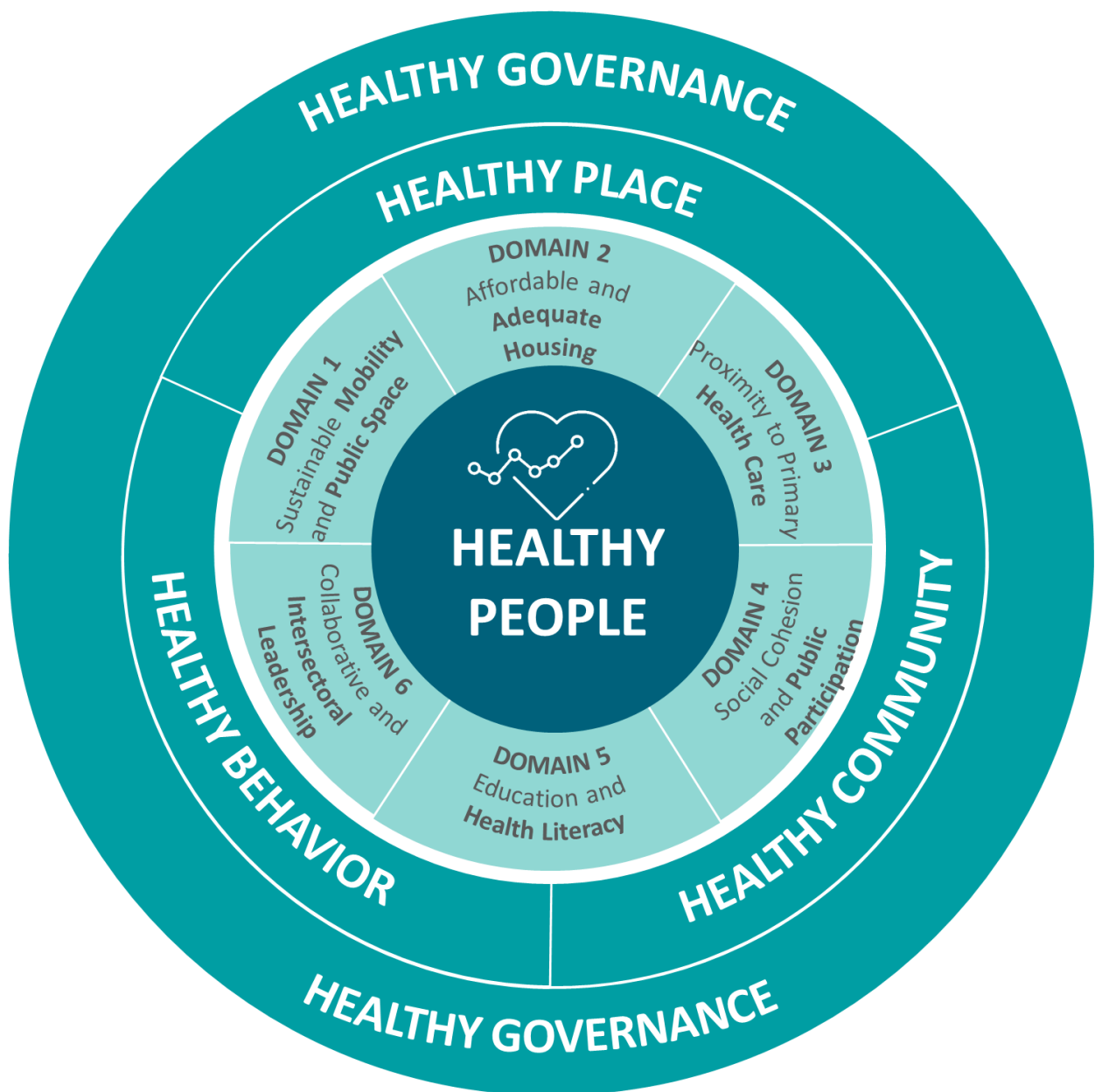
An abstract graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of overlapping circles and lines in shades of blue and pink. The circles are of varying sizes and are connected by a network of lines, creating a complex, interconnected pattern.

Basic information	
WHO Region	EURO
City or Country	Coimbra, Portugal
Timeline	2021-2025 (ongoing)
Type of intervention	Policy; governance
Primary level of implementation	City
Primary sectors involved	Health; urban planning; housing; transport; social development; education
Primary health outcomes or challenges	Health inequities; place-based determinants; access to services

Case description

The Estratégia Municipal de Saúde de Coimbra 2021–2025 (Coimbra Municipal Health Strategy) (EMS) is a city-level framework designed to integrate health considerations into all municipal policies and to guide intersectoral action toward health equity. Developed through a partnership between the City Council of Coimbra and the University of Coimbra, it represents the first fully articulated municipal health strategy of the city under Portugal’s new decentralization framework (Lei n.º 50/2018) and the implementing legislation (Lei n.º 23/2019) that transferred certain public health competences to local governments. The EMS provides both a diagnostic health profile and an action framework: the former maps local health determinants and outcomes across the city’s 18 civil parishes (neighborhoods), while the latter defines priorities, objectives, and an implementation plan.

Work began in 2020 with an extensive place-based assessment combining administrative data and a community survey of 1117 residents. The analysis revealed pronounced geographic differences in morbidity, service access, housing quality, and environmental conditions. Areas experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage or with poorer infrastructure were found to experience higher burdens of chronic disease and lower perceived well-being. These findings shaped a participatory planning process: workshops and online sessions involved municipal departments, regional health agencies, health-care professionals, and community representatives convened through a newly established Municipal Health Council. Stakeholders jointly prioritized problems using a Delphi-type method and formulated actions at neighborhood scale.



Strategic vision of the Municipal Health Strategy of Coimbra. Source: Municipal Health Strategy of Coimbra 2021-2025.

The resulting plan organizes municipal health governance around six strategic domains:

- Sustainable mobility and public space;
- Affordable and adequate housing;
- Proximity to primary health care;
- Social cohesion and public participation;
- Education and health literacy; and
- Collaborative and intersectoral leadership.

The plan comprises 41 strategic actions and 94 specific activities, with clear objectives and indicators in each domain, and timelines through 2025. Examples of actions include expansion of cycling infrastructure, promotion of active transport, integration of health considerations into urban plans, and collaboration with the primary health care network to strengthen local service access. In addition to these operational measures, the city established a cross-cutting evaluation and monitoring framework, tracking determinants of physical and mental health like equitable access to green space, public transport, and others.

The EMS explicitly aligns with the National Health Plan (PNS), the Regional Health Plan of Centro Region, and Portugal's Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2026), linking municipal goals to national and European health and sustainability targets (including the SDGs). Its governance model positions the municipality as a convening actor—coordinating public, private, and civil-society partners—while embedding accountability through shared indicators and annual progress reviews. The strategy institutionalizes a Health in All Policies approach at city scale and operationalizes equity as both a guiding value and a measurable outcome.

Implementation began in 2022. Early progress includes integration of health metrics into spatial planning and specific activities like coordination of social and transport departments to reduce neighborhood disparities. Persistent challenges relate to uneven distribution of green areas and services between central and peripheral parishes, capacity constraints within municipal departments, and the need to maintain intersectoral commitment through political transitions. Continuous monitoring through the EMS evaluation framework—covering inputs, outputs, and impact indicators—is expected to inform adjustments through 2025 and to support replication in other Portuguese municipalities.

Strategic Highlight

In articulating a formal political mandate, the Coimbra Municipal Health Strategy gathers dispersed sectoral actions into a coherent, evidence-based city health policy.

Following national decentralization reforms, the City Council used its newly acquired authority in health to institutionalize a strategic process rather than isolated projects. The Municipal Health Strategy and Plan became the binding mechanism translating legislative intent into operational governance, integrating data, planning, and participation under a single framework.

Three design elements illustrate the strength of the mandate:

- **Legal and Institutional Anchoring** – By grounding the EMS in Law 50/2018 and aligning it with the National Health Plan and the Portugal 2030 Strategy, Coimbra embedded health objectives within the planning instruments that already guide economic and territorial policy. This ensures continuity across political cycles and eligibility for national funding streams.
- **Integrated Knowledge Base** – The EMS provides a scientific foundation for decision-making, combining geospatial, epidemiologic, and social data. The city's partnership with the University of Coimbra secures analytical capacity and methodological rigor, providing political leaders with a shared evidence platform to justify priorities.
- **Participatory and Intersectoral Governance** – The Municipal Health Council institutionalizes collaboration between health authorities, planners, social services, academia, and citizens. This participatory structure turns the political mandate into an ongoing governance practice that balances administrative authority with collective accountability.

Through these mechanisms, the EMS achieves strategic coherence across sectors: health becomes a cross-cutting lens for mobility, housing, and education policies, among others. The case shows how urban health improvement benefits not only from technical measures but also from a whole-of-government mandate embedded in statutory planning. For decision-makers elsewhere, Coimbra's experience underscores that municipal leadership, empowered by national legislation and supported by academic evidence, can operationalize Health in All Policies principles within existing governance systems and deliver measurable progress toward equitable, sustainable urban well-being.

Further Information

- [Perfil Municipal de Saúde de Coimbra 2020](#)
- [Plano Municipal de Saúde de Coimbra 2022-2025](#)
- [Putting Health at the Heart of Local Planning Through an Integrated Municipal Health Strategy](#)