



**International  
Standard**

**ISO 37111**

**Sustainable cities and  
communities — Urban settlements  
— Guidance for a flexible approach to  
phased implementation of ISO 37101**

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# Contents

	Page
<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>1 Scope</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Normative references</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>3 Terms and definitions</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>4 Aspects and characteristics of urban settlements</b> .....	<b>2</b>
4.1 General.....	2
4.2 Implementing ISO 37101 in urban settlements.....	3
4.3 Considering progressive implementation of ISO 37101.....	3
<b>5 Context of the organization</b> .....	<b>4</b>
5.1 Understanding the organization and its context.....	4
5.2 Identifying the organization.....	4
5.3 Identifying interested parties and engaging collaboration and participation of all.....	5
<b>6 Tools and methods to support the implementation</b> .....	<b>6</b>
6.1 General.....	6
6.2 Tool and method 1 — Building and promoting shared vision locally.....	7
6.3 Tool and method 2 — Organizing workshops by engaging interested parties.....	8
6.4 Tool and method 3 — Readiness — Getting prepared to initiate the process.....	9
6.5 Tool and method 4 — Conducting capability review.....	10
6.6 Tool and method 5 — Identifying and adjusting a roadmap with interim objectives or milestones.....	10
6.6.1 Roadmap.....	10
6.6.2 Interim objectives.....	11
6.6.3 Milestones.....	12
6.7 Tool and method 6 — Adopting a risk management approach.....	12
6.8 Tool and method 7 — Specific plans, public policies and incentives.....	13
6.8.1 Specific planning.....	13
6.8.2 Use of public policies and incentives.....	14
6.9 Tool and method 8 — Using action plans with tasks for responsible actioners.....	15
6.10 Tool and method 9 — Using a KPI framework to drive implementation.....	16
6.11 Tool and method 10 — Monitoring, reporting and verification of progressing process.....	17
6.11.1 General.....	17
6.11.2 Establishing evaluation models.....	17
6.11.3 Undertaking analysis and continuing improvement.....	18
6.11.4 Reporting.....	19
<b>Annex A (informative) Examples of interim objectives that contribute to address the six purposes provided in ISO 37101 and with an indication of the corresponding 17 UN SDGs</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Annex B (informative) Tools and methods in ISO 37111 (this document) that contribute to the five steps in ISO 37104</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Annex C (informative) Examples of a KPI framework for sustainable urban settlements</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Annex D (informative) Examples of evaluation models</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>32</b>



## Introduction

ISO 37101 establishes a management system for the sustainable development of cities and communities. It aims to be applicable to all urban settlements of any size and characteristics. However, it is considered that the context, size and characteristics of certain urban settlements are sufficiently different for there to be a need for additional guidance to facilitate a more flexible and appropriate implementation of ISO 37101. This document provides relevant guidance, tools and methodologies to allow for these specific circumstances and, more generally, to also facilitate the initial stages of sustainable development, or a planned phased implementation, of ISO 37101, where this is needed.

The definition of “urban settlements” is not simple, as it depends on many interdependent factors. Some of them relate, for example, to the size of the settlement’s population in relation to a region’s wider geography, or how the administrative units are organised in a local or national context. The term also has varying designations in different languages, that are not always equivalent. For the purposes of this document, we will mainly be referring to urban settlements that are relatively small in size compared to big cities or metropolitan areas. We will also include subdivisions of a city, such as neighbourhoods, boroughs or urban districts. Specialised urban settlements can, for example, include urban settlements based around ports or harbours, railway junctions, market towns, a single specialised industry such as mining or steel-making, tourism centres, administrative, ecclesiastical or educational (e.g. university) centres. These often do not have the full range of functions and services normally associated with a large city.

The specialised or smaller urban settlements we are considering will typically still have a certain level of administrative autonomy in decision-making. This includes the ability to independently manage resources, such as having control over a budget.

In spite of the diversity of characteristics of urban settlements, the range of problems in relation to sustainability can be similar to those affecting large urban developments. However, the scale and intensity of those problems can be less or be more focused, while the administrative or organizational unit will often have access to proportionately less resource.

Given the complexity of sustainable development, the technical knowledge required to understand the wide array of subjects involved should not always be available in smaller or more specialised urban settlements, including in public administration. This can be one of the most significant challenges faced by specialised or smaller urban settlements when engaging in the promotion of sustainable development and the implementation of a full management system.

This document gives guidance for different types of urban settlements, some with specific functions, others at different stages of sustainable development, to implement ISO 37101 flexibly and manageably. Different histories, demographics, local industries, geographic locations, innovation skills and other distinctive characteristics can be considered on a case-by-case basis, recognizing that each type of urban settlement needs to develop in a way that reflects and enhances their unique characteristics and experiences. Their distinguishing features, which underpin their attractiveness, quality of life, and social cohesion, will also generate specific cross-cutting issues and encourage diversity.

In a specialised or smaller urban settlement, solutions and initiatives that promote sustainable development need to be more focused and they eventually demand smaller but carefully targeted investment. These smaller or specialised urban settlements can make a start and take small steps in sustainable development through being creative, and using simple but accessible solutions, making more use of SMART processes and methods (software) and relying on local people's knowledge and education (rather than more expensive infrastructure and hardware).

This document provides a flexible approach, giving guidance to urban settlements that have limited resources and could only meet the full ISO 37101 requirements through small, phased steps and gradual improvements that eventually build maturity (see the maturity model provided in [Annex D](#)). The tools and methods included allow administrative units or organizations to monitor and measure the progress of improving sustainable development outcomes at successively higher levels of maturity, and as they develop to dynamically adjust their results and expectations to remain aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



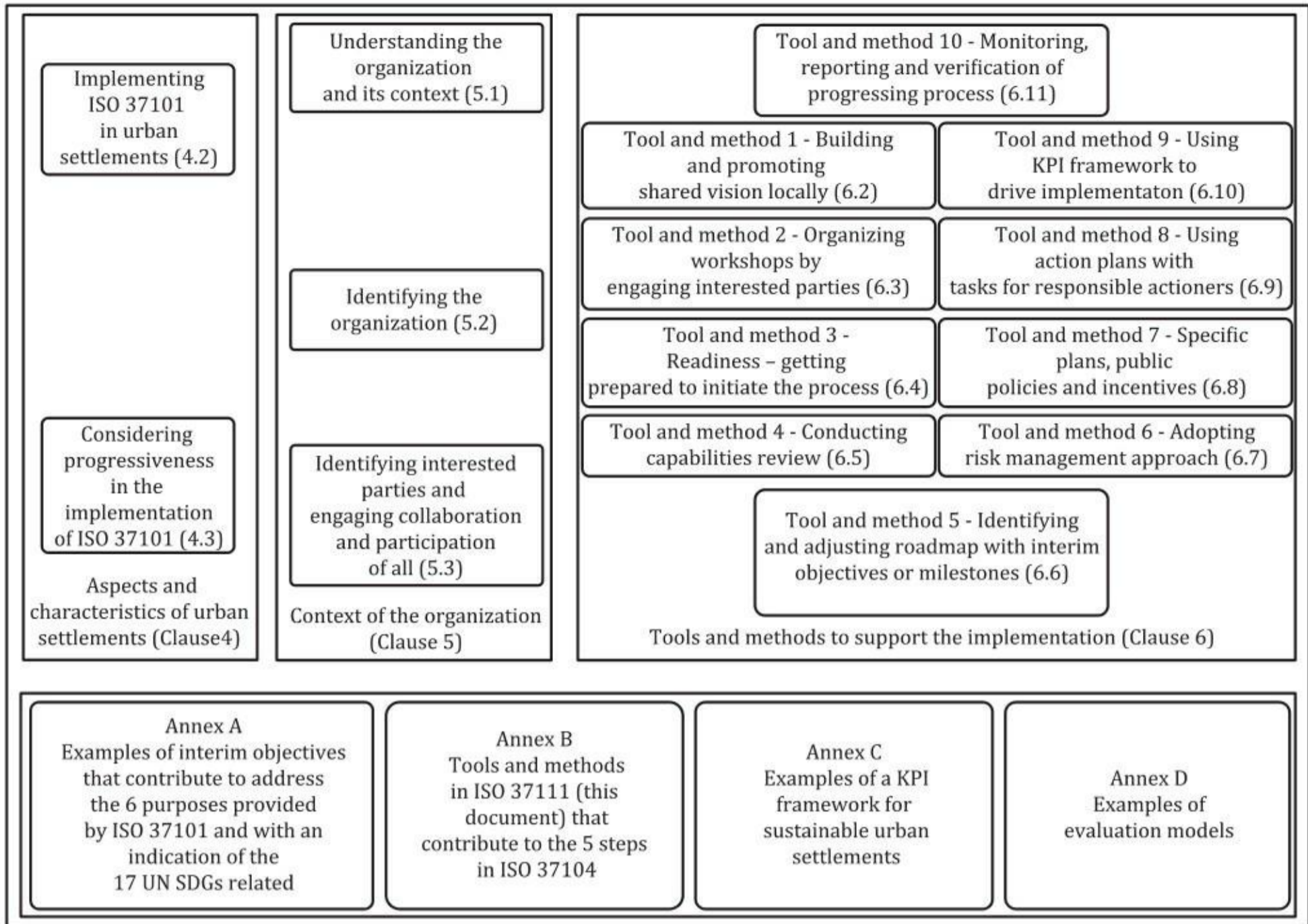
There are some characteristics that foster successful sustainable development for smaller or more specialised urban settlements, including:

- **Creativity:** Being creative can contribute significantly to the sustainable growth of smaller or more specialised urban settlements. As an example, new technologies can be pioneered at a smaller scale, because it is easier to pilot smaller or niche sustainable schemes (e.g. local currencies for tourist towns or car-sharing in more ruralised, dispersed communities) due to lower operational costs locally. These conveniences and advantages can improve quality of life locally and so help to attract more residents, visitors, and investors.
- **Local context:** The unique distinction that a local context has can be utilized to avoid homogenized solutions. Therefore, it is critical to identify potential opportunities and risks for local improvement. For example, it can be relevant to consider intergenerational inequity issues such as providing facilities or infrastructure that serves a range of ages especially children and aging people.
- **Cooperation:** Active collaboration in various forms, such as intercity, inter-regional, and international collaboration, assists urban settlements to make the best use of resources at the lowest possible cost, to counteract risks together, and become more resilient, e.g. collective energy purchase. Furthermore, issues such as lowering carbon emissions rely heavily on the cross-sectoral synergy of the energy supply, mobility, buildings and materials, and behaviour. Therefore, cooperation between administrative units or local organizations at different levels is important, so that joint efforts can be made to achieve the overall goal.
- **Connection:** Accessibility is vital for sustainable development. Urban settlements are interconnected with adjacent regions and cities, and better connections within megacities can improve public services and transportation conditions, while investment in improving infrastructure (particularly large infrastructure) is typically unaffordable for smaller urban settlements on their own. Moreover, ecological corridors can greatly improve the environmental impact of the entire region.
- **Competition:** It is important to maintain a good business environment, i.e. simplifying the start-up process, protecting minority investors, and providing good-quality public services. Meanwhile, opportunities for mutuality should be explored in new emerging areas such as e-business, smart cities, cyber technologies, artificial intelligence, the Metaverse and the digital economy in order to increase sustainability and competition.
- **Competence:** Smaller urban settlements increasingly attract and retain talent due to a relatively superior quality of life. They can also promote the formation of industry clusters that bring together businesses from similar sectors, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among businesses. For example, by focusing on knowledge-based industries, smaller urban settlements can attract a diverse range of businesses and entrepreneurs, which create a culture of continuous learning and professional development.

This document contains a scope ([Clause 1](#)), normative references ([Clause 2](#)), terms and definitions ([Clause 3](#)), and aspects and characteristics of urban settlements ([Clause 4](#)). [Clause 5](#) elaborates on the context of the organization. [Clause 6](#) provides ten tools and methods. [Figure 1](#) illustrates an overview of the main components in this document.



# ISO 37111:2024(en)



**Figure 1 — Overview of the main components in ISO 37111 (this document)**