



What is ISO/TC 37/SC 5, and What Role Does It Play in the Language Services Industry?

By Carina Balbo, ATC ISO Committee

The ISO Technical Committee 37, Subcommittee 5 ([ISO/TC 37/SC 5](#)) is at the forefront of shaping standards for the translation, interpreting, and related technology sectors, contributing significantly to the evolution of the global language services industry. The SC5 subcommittee operates under the overarching ISO/TC 37, a technical committee dedicated to language and terminology standards. Within this framework, ISO/TC 37/SC5 directly addresses the translation and interpreting domains, establishing internationally recognised standards that impact both service quality and industry practices across the globe.

The Significance of ISO in Standardisation

[ISO](#), the International Organization for Standardization, is a non-profit, independent entity that unifies national standard bodies from around the world. Each member country is represented by one national standards body—such as the [BSI](#) in the UK, [AFNOR](#) in France, and [DIN](#) in Germany—forming a global network that collectively defines and implements industry standards. These standards provide practical information, best practices, and solutions to global challenges, and although they are not mandatory, they represent consensus-based solutions that industry stakeholders are encouraged to adopt.

ISO standards are crucial in harmonising practices across sectors, making products and services compatible, addressing safety concerns, and offering guidelines for service consistency. However, as participation in ISO's committees requires national body nomination, individuals and companies interested in contributing to ISO standards must coordinate with their respective national bodies to engage in the standards development process.

ISO/TC 37/SC 5: Structure and Working Groups

[ISO/TC 37/SC 5](#) is specifically organised to address the needs of the language services industry. Chaired by Maryse Benhoff from Canada and managed by Christine Reichhardt from DIN, the subcommittee operates through five primary working groups, each dedicated to unique aspects of translation and interpreting:

TCG Terminology coordination group: This group is responsible for aligning terminology across the different working groups, ensuring that terms and definitions are consistent and that a harmonised language is used across standards. Michael Short, from the European Parliament leads this effort.

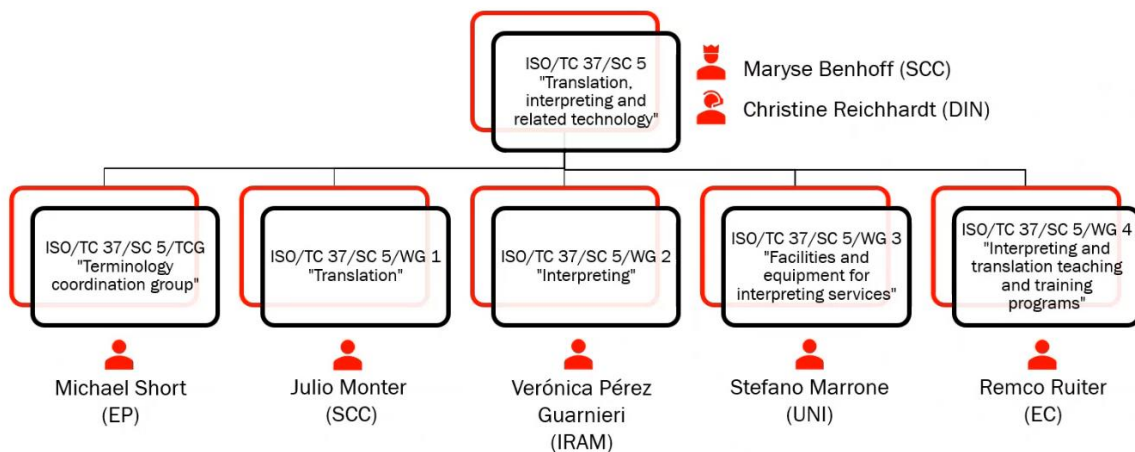
WG 1 Translation: Under the leadership of Julio Montero, from Canada, this group focuses on standards relating to translation processes, methodologies, and quality assurance.

WG 2 Interpreting: Led by Verónica Pérez Guarnieri, from Argentina, this group addresses interpreting standards, providing guidelines for interpreter competencies, service requirements, and ethical practices.

WG 3 Facilities and equipment for interpreting services: Convened by Stefano Marrone, from Italy, this group standardises equipment requirements for interpreting services, which is especially relevant in settings like conferences and judicial environments.

WG 4 Interpreting and translation teaching and training programs: The newest working group, led by Remco Ruiters, from the European Commission, focuses on establishing standards for training programmes in community interpreting, ensuring interpreters are well-prepared for diverse interpreting environments.

Overview of ISO/TC 37/SC 5



Source: EUATC ISO/TC37/SC 5 webinar presentation 7 October 2024 by Christine Reichhardt

This structure allows ISO/TC 37/SC 5 to respond to the complex needs of the translation and interpreting sectors while fostering a collaborative environment where experts from around the world contribute their insights.

How ISO Standards Are Developed

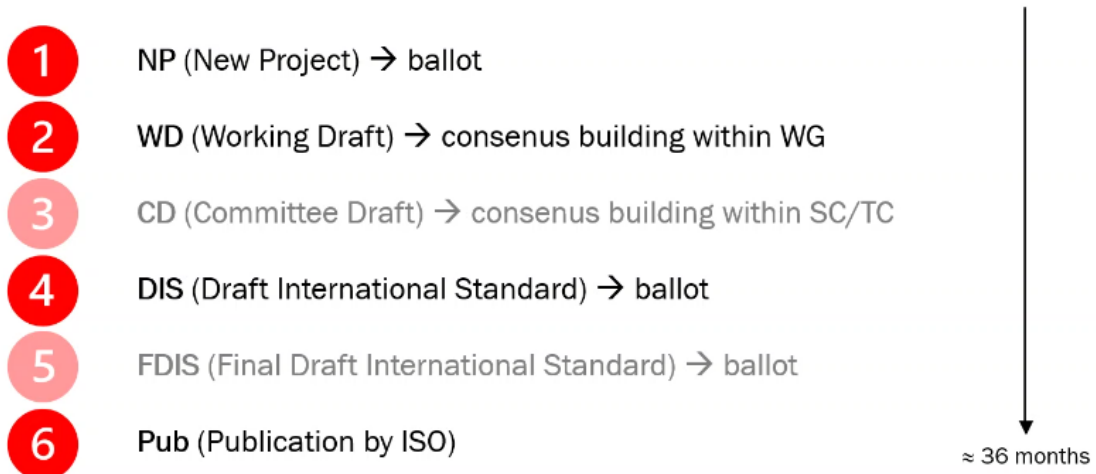
The process of developing ISO standards is complex and rigorous, often taking up to three years to complete due to the need for consensus across participating countries. Standards development follows several key stages:

1. **Proposal Stage:** Any ISO member can propose a new project (NP), which then undergoes a ballot within the relevant committee (e.g., ISO/TC 37/SC 5).
2. **Working Draft Stage (WD):** Approved proposals are assigned to a working group where an initial draft is prepared, focusing on building consensus among experts.

3. **Committee Draft Stage (CD):** At this optional but often utilised stage, the draft is reviewed by the committee, and member countries provide feedback to refine the draft further.
4. **Draft International Standard (DIS):** The draft is then distributed globally for voting and comment by all ISO member countries.
5. **Final Draft International Standard (FDIS):** If necessary, a final draft is issued for final approval, where only editorial comments are considered.
6. **Publication:** Once approved, the standard is officially published by the ISO Central Secretariat.

These stages reflect the commitment to thoroughness and broad representation, as standards must accommodate the needs and expectations of a global market.

Development of an International Standard



Source: EUATC ISO/TC37/SC 5 webinar presentation 7 October 2024 by Christine Reichhardt

How to Participate in ISO/TC 37/SC5

For industry professionals and organisations looking to shape the future of language services, participation in ISO/TC 37/SC 5 offers a unique opportunity. To become involved, interested individuals or organisations should connect with their national standard bodies to join a National Mirror Committee, which can nominate them as experts to participate in SC 5 or other relevant committees. For example, in the UK, experts from the Association of Translation Companies (ATC), including Carina Balbo and Jane Crossley, work with the British Standards Institute (BSI) to represent British interests in SC 5 projects.



Through this engagement, stakeholders can help craft standards that influence the quality, consistency, and future direction of the translation and interpreting industry.

Conclusion

ISO/TC 37/SC 5 stands as a vital contributor to the language services industry, offering internationally recognised standards that guide translation, interpreting, and related technologies. By participating in the development of these standards, language professionals and organisations can ensure that their expertise shapes the future of a dynamic industry while promoting global best practices that instil trust and drive innovation in language services.

Read more about ISO standards development for language services at

<https://atccertification.com/about-iso-standards/>