



ISO 18587 – Post-editing of Machine Translation Output – Evolving Standards for a Hybrid Future

By Jane Crossley, ATC ISO Committee

Understanding ISO 18587: A Process-Oriented Standard

[ISO 18587:2017](#) provides a framework for the post-editing of machine translation output (MTPE) and defines the qualifications of professionals involved in the process. The standard is aimed at translation service providers such as language service companies, freelance translators, and internal language departments. As a requirements standard, these organisations can be certified against it to demonstrate to their clients that they are focussed on a regulated approach to MTPE to ensure that the quality of the translation remains as high as possible.

Unlike ISO 17100, which focuses on human translation (HT), ISO 18587 acknowledges that translation today takes place in hybrid workflows where translation memories (TMs) and machine translation (MT) systems coexist. It does not evaluate these systems as technology evolves at such a rapid pace that it would be impossible for the standard to keep up with it.

The Revision of ISO 18587

Originally registered in 2012 and published in 2017, ISO 18587 underwent its first formal review within ISO in 2022 when it was decided not to revise the standard.

At the EUATC / ISO TC 37/SC 5 knowledge-sharing webinar in February 2025, co-project leader Eva-Maria Tillmann explained that technically there wasn't a majority to enforce the revision; however there was plenty of support. Also, given the increased use of the hybrid translation workflow, the national experts interested in this standard decided to update it anyway, starting the revision process in October 2023. The revised version is expected to be published in October 2026.

The group revising the standard, led by co-project leaders Eva-Maria Tillmann and Livia Florensa, have had to overcome several challenges before taking on the task of revising the standard. Firstly, they initially wanted to change the term "machine translation" and replace it with "non-human translation" to acknowledge not just MT systems but also generative AI and LLMs that are used today. However, this would involve changing the title and scope which is not permitted in an existing standard – instead it would have to be withdrawn and replaced – therefore, it was decided to update the standard in its existing structure.

ISO 18587's revision acknowledges the much increased use of MTPE and other non-human methods of translation in modern translation workflows. While MT enhances productivity, reduces turnaround time, and lowers costs, human expertise remains indispensable in ensuring quality. The revised



standard acknowledges this reality, reinforcing that only qualified post-editors should be involved in MTPE.

Key Updates

The revised ISO 18587 – still under development – will maintain its foundation but incorporate refinements to improve clarity and relevance:

- **Greater emphasis on customer requirements:** while the standard continues to describe full post-editing as achieving quality comparable to human translation, it now places more focus on customer requirements, needs analysis, and risk assessment.
- **Levels of post-editing:** there is still a distinction between light and full post-editing, but the level applied is guided by the customer specifications.
- **Alignment with ISO 17100:** the standard has been revised so that the structure matches that of ISO 17100 as the process and quality achieved by either human translation or MTPE should be similar.
- **Expanded terminology and references:** six additional pages have been added to the draft, new terms such as “non-human translation”, “artificial intelligence translation” and “automated post-editing” have also been incorporated. The terminology standard has also been added as a normative reference and there are links to other industry standards, including ISO 11669, ISO 17100, and ISO 5060, to promote a greater integration among industry guidelines.
- **Focus on feasibility:** a dedicated clause and annex has been added to help project managers decide if MTPE is suitable for a text.

Looking Ahead: the Path to 2026

There is still some way to go in terms of developing the revision, with several commenting rounds ahead. Experts will continue to refine the document to ensure clarity, usability, and alignment with industry needs. By placing greater emphasis on customer-driven specifications and hybrid translation scenarios, the updated standard aims to provide more practical guidance for language service providers navigating the ever evolving translation landscape.

If you are interested in getting involved in the development of ISO standards, start your journey of exploration on the EUATC’s ISO web page: <https://euatc.org/iso-standards-for-language-services/>

Let’s build a stronger, more standardised industry together!