Request For Proposals (RFP): Online Conference Platform and Services for the 2026 ISA Conference

I.   Introduction and Context

The International Sociological Association (ISA) invites qualified vendors to submit proposals for providing an online conference platform and related services for its first fully virtual **Online Conference**, scheduled for **25–27 June 2026**.

ISA is a globally recognized scholarly association committed to advancing sociological research, collaboration, and dialogue across continents. Three prior formats inform this new format: a digital-only event in the COVID era (2020), an experimental hybrid event (2023), and many fully in-person conferences since the association's founding in 1948.

This online conference will bring together sociologists and scholars from all world regions, and will be designed to prioritize **accessibility, multilingualism, and an interactive participant experience**. ISA seeks an experienced and reliable partner capable of delivering a robust, flexible, and user-friendly digital infrastructure that supports large-scale academic programming and international engagement.

Key Parameters of the 2026 Online Conference

- **Expected live attendance**: 2,000–6,000 delegates (presenters and viewers)

- **Abstract submissions**: ~12,000, with ~4,000 accepted presentations

- **Research networks involved**: 70 (each curates its own thematic stream)

- **Session types**:
    - 6x Full Plenary Sessions
    - ~50 concurrent breakout sessions with live presentations (slides sharing), pre-recorded video playback, and live Q&A
    - Networking lounges or social spaces

- **Breakout session length**: 120 minutes

- **Daily schedule**: 00:00–20:00 UTC, covering APAC, EMEA, and Americas time zones.

- **Support structure**: ~300 volunteer technical hosts across 3 days (~concurrent); central support desk for real-time escalation (no technician per room)

- **Recording and access**:
    - Session recordings published within 2 hours of live broadcast.
    - Delegate access to recordings for 30 days post-event.
    - Plenary and professional development sessions archived on the ISA website and YouTube channel.

- **Public stream**: Opening and closing plenaries (2 per every time zone band) streamed via RTMP (or equivalent) to the ISA YouTube channel.

II.   Scope of Work

The ideal vendor will supply a single SaaS stack (or tightly integrated bundle) that delivers *all* of the following. However, we do appreciate that many vendors may not be able to provide an end-to-end service. If you can deliver just a portion of the service, but have strong suggestions or collaborations with other vendors, we are open to discussing options:

1. **Abstract & Session Management** – The platform must either:

    - **Provide a built-in abstract and session management module** that enables configurable workflows, multi-stage peer review, and decentralized program curation by multiple committee streams.
    OR

    - **Integrate seamlessly with ISA's external system** for abstract review and session scheduling. In this case, the platform must support structured data import/export (e.g., via CSV or API) to efficiently build and display the final program. This includes automated session merging and time slot assignment.

    In both scenarios, the solution must accommodate ISA's **dual-stage process**:

    - A **call for session proposals**, managed by ISA's research networks and other stakeholders.

    - A **call for abstracts**, mapped to the accepted sessions and assigned to one of three designated time bands (APAC, EMEA, or Americas).

2. **Scheduling Engine** - automatic slot builder that respects the three anchor time bands and 120 minutes breakout template; UI to drag-and-drop fixes. Must allow coordinators to assign sessions to one of three time zone tracks (APAC, EMEA, Americas), with the final published program merging all into a unified schedule respecting local times.

3. **Live Delivery** - 1 exclusive plenary stream (≥4,000 viewers, RTMP dual-cast to YouTube), ~50 parallel rooms with screen-share, chat, raise-hand, chair controls, audio-only dial-in, and potential bridge for China.

4. **Captions & Translation** - Live interpretation of plenaries in English, Spanish, and French is required. AI translation and captioning for breakout sessions are desirable and should be priced separately. Please specify whether AI services run locally or server-side, and their language coverage.

5. **Persistent Networking** - session-linked text channels, and networking channels that remain open for the full conference + 30 days: DMs between delegates available.

6. **Recordings & Podcasts** - auto VOD in ≤ 2 hours, downloadable MP3 cut for podcast feed, delegate portal for 30 days, archival move to ISA storage.

7. **Analytics** - real-time stream health, attendee count, chat export.

8. **Training & Support** - training and support materials for volunteer breakout hosts; live help-desk chat during 20-hour show windows; 24 h SLA (service level agreement) through run-of-show.

9. **Data & Compliance** - EU data centre; GDPR, SCCs, ISO 27001; right-to-be-forgotten within 14 days.

10. **Accessibility**—The platform must provide an accessibility statement, demonstrate WCAG 2.1 AA compliance via testing or certification, and include low-bandwidth access options.

11. **Integrations:**

   - **Single Sign-On (SSO)**: The platform must support SSO integration with the ISA membership portal, allowing registered members to log in using their existing ISA credentials.

   - **External Registration and Payment System**: The registration and payment process will be managed externally by ISA. The platform must allow seamless import of registration data (including access permissions and roles) from ISA's registration system.

   - Abstract submission system (external or optional integration)

Out-of-scope: posters, external promotion.

III.   Functional Matrix Annex

Please see the Functional Matrix Annex below, where you can find every **must-have** (M) and **desirable** (D) feature for the services we need in two consecutive lists. Mark each line with ✔ (full), **Partial**, or ✖ (not offered), and add clarifying notes for better understanding.

IV.   Training & Self-Support

- Volunteers will be hosts in the breakout sessions, in exchange for a free ticket.

- We need training for these people on how to open rooms, manage delegates, and share screen, etc.

- Two live drop-in "tech office hours" the week before Day 1.

- Knowledge-based articles should include video tutorials and FAQs, which should be searchable in the vendor portal.

V.   Proposal Submission Guidelines

Please organize your submission using the structure below, ensuring each section is clearly labelled and comprehensive.

1. **Company Profile** | Provide a concise overview of your company, including size, location(s), core services, and team structure.

2. **Relevant Experience** | Describe your experience, especially with academic or NGO clients. Include examples of similar events delivered, specifying type of event (e.g., hybrid congress, virtual conference), client profile, year and number of participants, platform and features used.

3. **Client References** | Provide at least 2–3 references, ideally from international or academic organizations, including: Client name and organization, Contact details (email and/or phone), Brief description of the event.

4. **Platform and Services Description**

    4.1.   A detailed description of the proposed platform and services, structured according to the features in the Functional Matrix Annex: "must-have" features & "desirable" features. For each feature, clarify whether it is fully available, partially met, or not supported and how it is implemented.

4.2. Describe how your solution accommodates three parallel program tracks based on three time zone (Americas / EMEA / APAC).

4.3. Describe how your solution synchronises the sessions with the participants' local time zones and describe how your system is dealing with speaker and delegate time-specific scheduling.

4.4. Include a detailed timeline covering all implementation and onboarding milestones:

Milestone	Proposed Date
Abstract portal live	[Insert date]
Reviewer onboarding	[Insert date]
Registration launch	[Insert date]
Schedule locked	[Insert date]
First mass tech rehearsal	[Insert date]
Congress week	25–27 June 2026
Recording archive expiry	27 July 2026

5. Pricing

Please provide a line-by-line pricing as follows:

5.1. Must-have features: an itemized list with cost per feature.

5.2. Desirable features: an itemized list with cost per feature (if available).

5.3. Platform licensing or access fees if applicable.

6. **Evaluation Criteria**:

- Suitability of the platform to ISA needs

- Cost-effectiveness and transparency

- Accessibility and multilingual capabilities

- Technical support quality and availability

- Relevant experience and client satisfaction

VI.   RFP Timeline

- **RFP Release**: June 6, 2025

- **Deadline for Questions**: June 23, 2025

- **Proposal Submission Deadline**: July 17, 2025

- **Evaluation Period**: July 21–30, 2025 *(excluding Forum week)*

- **Vendor Notification**: August 6, 2025

- **Project Kick-off**: August 11, 2025

VII.   Legal & Contractual Terms

- Governing law: Spain (ISA HQ)

- All personal data must be processed in compliance with EU GDPR, and vendors must detail their privacy policies and data handling protocols.

- Payment:

   o   20 % on signature,

   o   50 % distributed between the moment the portal goes live and the final program release, depending on the offered services (abstract management or not),

   o   30 % post-, subject to SLA compliance.

- Penalty: 5 % of the licence per 30-minute platform outage over the SLA

VIII.   Contact Information

All inquiries and submissions should be directed to:

Cecilia Delgado-Molina
Executive Secretary
International Sociological Association
Email: cecilia-delgado@isa-sociology.org

Website: https://www.isa-sociology.org

We thank you in advance for your interest in supporting the ISA and our global community of sociologists. We look forward to reviewing your proposal.

Request For Proposals (RFP): Online Conference Platform and Services for the 2026 ISA Conference
Annex 1

Must-have Features

Reference	Requirement	Must-have	✔ / ✘ / Partial	Notes
A - Abstracts / Agenda				
A1	Custom session & abstract submission system	M		
A2	Double-blind review per track	M		
A3	Bulk CSV in/out at every stage	M		
A4	Session tagging by stream and time band	M		
A5	Unified published schedule showing each user's local time	M		
R - Registration				
R1	Promo-codes with usage cap	M		
R2	Delegate schedule view with local time zone shown	M		
L - Live Delivery				
L1	~50 parallel rooms with screen-share, video share, chat, raise-hand	M		
L2	Plenary RTMP dual cast to YouTube	M		

L3	Audio-only dial-in fallback for low-bandwidth delegates	M		
L4	Session-chair admin roles (share, mute-all, spotlight)	M		
C - Captions & Recordings				
C1	Each plenary has floor audio and simultaneous EN-FR-ES channels, with matching live captions.	M		
C2	Delegates have access to recordings for 30 days	M		
N - Networking				
N1	Always open networking space with delegate DMs	M		
D - Data & compliance				
D1	EU storage, 30-day retention	M		
D2	Right-to-be-forgotten implemented (≤14 days)	M		
S - Support & Training				
S1	Help-desk widget with live chat escalation	M		
S2	Tech training for volunteer hosts (video + live)	M		
S3	Two live drop-in "Tech Office Hours" before the event	M		
S4	Guaranteed SLA ≤24h during live event	M		
S5	Help-desk chat during 20-hour show windows	M		
U - Accessibility				

U1	WCAG 2.1 AA baseline	M		
T – Technical Infrastructure				
T1	Platform uptime (Congress dates) guaranteed at ≥99.9%	M		
T2	Peak concurrency: 1 plenary @2,000 viewers + 50 breakout rooms	M		

Desirable Features

Ref	Requirement	Desirable	✔ / ✘ / Partial	Notes
A - Abstracts / Agenda				
AD1	Auto-scheduler obeys Americas / EMEA / APAC bands	D		
AD2	Drag-and-drop UI to adjust final schedule	D		
R - Registration				
RD1	Role-based checkout with potential for 18 ticket types - auto selected with info through SSO	D		
RD2	Import of registration data from ISA system (roles, permissions)	D		
RD3	Delegate personal schedule builder	D		
L - Live Delivery				
LD1	Low-latency live streaming	D		
LD2	Streaming access in China or regional mirror (if needed)	D		
LD3	Live session polling or emoji reactions	D		

C - Captions & Recordings				
CD1	Downloadable transcript on recording	D		
CD2	AI captions for all breakout sessions in all languages	D		
CD3	Recording availability ≤ 120 min after session	D		
CD4	MP3 audio cuts for podcast distribution	D		
N - Networking				
ND1	Persistent text channel tied to each session ID	D		
D - Data & compliance				
DD1	Real-time analytics (attendance, chat logs, session diagnostics)	D		
S - Support & Training				
SD1	Real-time stream-health dashboard	D		
SD2	Searchable knowledge base (FAQs, videos, troubleshooting)	D		
U - Accessibility				
UD1	Low-bandwidth access modes available (e.g., audio-only, text-only)	D		