

# Terms of Reference (ToR)

## Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair (SVMAC) Grant Program – Moldova

*Issued: March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026*

*Application Deadline: April 25, 2026*

### 1. Introduction and background

1.1. The purpose of this document is to establish the Terms of Reference for the Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair Grant Program, detailing its operational framework, objectives, responsibilities, eligibility criteria, management processes, and implementation procedures.

The Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair (SVMAC) initiative in Moldova represents a strategic partnership between the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Moldova and SVMAC Member Universities. It aims to strengthen the engagement of these academic institutions with UNHCR's mandate to provide international protection to refugees and seek permanent solutions for their problems, aligning with the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees and fostering a multi-stakeholder approach.

The SVMAC initiative seeks to create a robust framework for collaboration, focusing on four key objectives:

- Strengthening institutional engagement between UNHCR and universities.
- Promoting academic learning and research on forced displacement and statelessness.
- Enhancing community outreach and support for refugees and stateless persons, including access to services and higher education.
- Building capacity within universities to engage on refugee and statelessness issues.

Building on the successful implementation of the first grant cycle in 2025, UNHCR Moldova, in partnership with the Law Centre of Advocates (CDA), will continue the Grant Programme in 2026. The initial cycle supported 12 projects across 6 universities, demonstrating strong academic engagement in advancing refugee protection and inclusion. Under the 2026 Programme, priority will be given to research and advocacy initiatives led by SVMAC Member Universities to strengthen the role of academia in refugee protection during the transition phase of Moldova's refugee response. The programme seeks to enhance academic capacity to generate evidence, inform policy, and promote inclusive practices in support of displaced communities.

## Scope of Application

1.2. These Terms of Reference apply to all parties involved in the Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair Grant Program. UNHCR Moldova holds overall responsibility for the administration and supervision of the Program. The Law Centre of Advocates (CDA) serves as the implementing partner, responsible for the operational delivery of the Program. SVMAC Member Universities are the eligible applying institutions and grant recipients; these Terms of Reference accordingly govern the engagement of their academic staff, researchers, and students in the application process.

## 2. Grant Program Objectives

2.1. This grant program aims to fund projects that directly contribute to one of the specific objectives of the SVMAC grant programme objectives, particularly focusing on:

- **Objective 1 – Academic Research:** Support research that contributes to understanding the legal aspects, social cohesion, gendered aspects, economic inclusion and contribution, or psychological dimensions of forced displacement and statelessness in Moldova. Projects may include empirical studies, participatory research, or policy analysis, and should aim to generate knowledge that informs policy, improves practice, or amplifies underrepresented perspectives.
- **Objective 2 – Advocacy:** Support advocacy-driven initiatives that promote international protection by advancing rights-based approaches, strengthening access to services, and influencing institutional practices and public policy. Projects should focus on evidence-informed advocacy, legal and policy analysis, strategic engagement with duty-bearers, and practical mechanisms that support refugees in navigating national systems during the transition phase of the response.

*Note: Any project involving children shall ensure the implementation of appropriate safeguarding measures, including but not limited to the training of facilitators and adherence to established child protection protocols. All research activities must adhere to high ethical standards, particularly when involving vulnerable populations.*

## 3. Geographical Coverage

3.1. The Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair Grant Program shall be implemented exclusively within the territorial jurisdiction of the Republic of Moldova. All activities, projects, and initiatives funded or supported under the Program must be conducted strictly within the recognized national boundaries of the Republic of Moldova.

## 4. Grant Categories

4.1. Grants will be awarded across the following categories:

### Category A: Academic Research Grants

- **Focus:** Projects contributing to Objective 1, supporting academic research on the legal, social, gender, economic, or psychological dimensions of forced displacement and statelessness in Moldova.
- **Eligibility:** Open to SVMAC Member Universities. Focal points from designated Universities should act as the lead applicant of a project composed by academic staff in collaboration with undergraduate / postgraduate students as research contributors.
- **Funding Range:** up to 85,000 MDL per grant

### Category B: Institutional Advocacy and Policy Engagement Initiatives

- **Focus:** Projects contributing to Objective 2, centered on evidence-based advocacy, legal and policy analysis, and structured engagement with national and local authorities. Initiatives should aim to strengthen rights-based approaches, improve institutional practices, and enhance access to national systems for refugees and stateless persons in the context of the transition toward government-led responses.
- **Eligibility:** Open to SVMAC Member Universities. Focal points from designated Universities should act as the lead applicant of a project composed by academic staff in collaboration with undergraduate / postgraduate students as research contributors, ensuring the active involvement of academic staff and students in the design, analytical work, and implementation of advocacy activities.
- **Funding Range:** up to 85,000 MDL per grant

*Note: Each SVMAC Member University is entitled to submit **two (2) applications** across the entire Grant Program. The suggested number and range are indicative and can be adjusted based on the quality and scope of applications received.*

## 5. Eligibility Criteria

5.1. Applicants must meet the following criteria:

- **Affiliation:** Only SVMAC Member Universities located within the Republic of Moldova are eligible to apply as lead institutions.
- **Institutional Limit:** Each SVMAC Member University is permitted to submit only two (2) applications for this grant cycle.
- **Project Lead:** Each application must designate a SVMAC focal point as primary

project lead responsible for coordination and reporting.

- **Team Composition (if applicable):** Teams are encouraged. Applications demonstrating collaboration between students, faculty, and potentially involving **refugees or stateless persons** in design or implementation are viewed favorably.
- **Project Scope:** Proposed projects must align with at least one of the Grant Program Objectives (Section 2) and be implemented within Moldova.
- **Exclusions:** Funds cannot be used for tuition fees, scholarships (unless directly linked to a specific research output like thesis publication support, participation in academic contests), major capital expenditures, or activities outside the scope of the SVMAC objectives. Staff and family members from UNHCR or CDA, as well as SVMAC Member University staff directly involved in the management or selection process of this grant program, are ineligible to apply.

## 6. Application Requirements & Procedure

6.1. Complete applications must include the following documents.

1. **Project Proposal Form (Appendix A)** – Fully completed, detailing the project's rationale, objectives, activities, expected outcomes, timeline (months of 2026), and monitoring plan.
2. **Detailed Budget (Appendix B)** – Prepared using the provided template, outlining all anticipated costs and justifications. The budget must be submitted in MDL.
3. **Curriculum Vitae (CV)** – For the project lead and key team members (if applicable). Each CV must not exceed two (2) pages.
4. **Letter(s) of Support (Optional but Recommended)** – Such as endorsements from a supervising professor, relevant university department, or partner organization.
5. **Proof of Affiliation** – A valid copy of student ID, staff ID, or an official letter from the university confirming the applicant's status.
6. Declaration of accuracy of information and compliance with grant program requirements

All required documents must be received in PDF format through email. Incomplete applications or applications submitted through alternative means will not be considered. Applicants are strongly encouraged to verify that all documents are correctly uploaded

and formatted before final submission.

## 7.2 Submission Process:

- Applications must be submitted electronically in PDF format to: law-center@cda.md copying mdachrcf@unhcr.org
- The subject line of the email should read: "SVM Grant Application: [Project Title] - [Applicant Name]"
- **Deadline for Submission:** 25 April 2026, 23:59.
- Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

## 7. Selection Criteria

7.1. Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Relevance (30%):** Clear alignment with the SVMAC goals and the specific objectives of this Grant Program. related to the **refugee and statelessness** issues in the Moldovan context.
- **Impact Potential (25%):** Likelihood of achieving tangible, positive outcomes for **refugees, stateless persons**, the university community, or the field of refugee/statelessness studies. Potential for sustainability or scalability.
- **Feasibility & Methodology (20%):** Clarity and coherence of proposed activities, realistic timeline, and appropriate methodology.
- **Budget & Cost-Effectiveness (15%):** Justification of requested funds, realistic costing, and efficient use of resources.
- **Inclusivity & Innovation (10%):** Extent to which the project promotes inclusivity (e.g., involves **refugees/stateless persons** in design/implementation, benefits diverse groups, considers gender/ethnicity aspects) and demonstrates creative or innovative approaches.

## 8. Selection Process

8.1. The selection process is designed to be transparent and impartial:

1. **Eligibility Screening:** CDA and UNHCR focal points screens applications for completeness and basic eligibility criteria upon receipt. Incomplete or ineligible applications are notified.
2. **Technical Review:** Eligible applications are reviewed and scored by the Selection Committee (see Section 10) based on the Selection Criteria (Section 8).
3. **Committee Deliberation:** The Selection Committee meets to discuss the reviewed applications, scores, and make final funding recommendations based on consensus or majority vote. They may request clarifications from applicants if needed.

4. **Approval:** Final funding decisions are approved by SVMC Grant Program Selection Committee.
5. **Notification:** All applicants (successful and unsuccessful) will be notified of the outcome by CDA.

## 9. Selection Committee

9.1.A Selection Committee will be established to ensure a fair and expert review process.

- **Composition:** The Committee will comprise representatives from:
  - UNHCR Moldova (3 members)
  - CDA (2 members)
  - Academia (1 member)
- **Roles & Responsibilities:**
  - Review and score assigned applications based on agreed criteria.
  - Participate actively in deliberation meetings.
  - Provide recommendations for funding.
  - Maintain strict confidentiality regarding application contents and deliberations.
  - Declare any potential conflicts of interest prior to reviewing applications. Committee members with a conflict of interest regarding a specific application will recuse themselves from evaluating and discussing that proposal.

## 10. Grant Award & Management

- 10.1. The administration and disbursement of grants shall be undertaken by CDA, in coordination with UNHCR and the SVMAC Selection Committee, in accordance with the established procedures and guidelines governing the Program, under these Terms of Reference and CDA subgranting policy.
- 10.2. The **Selection Committee**, acting in its sole discretion, reserves the right to approve the proposal in its entirety, or to select only specific components deemed suitable and aligned with the Program's objectives. The conclusion of a Small Grant Agreement with **CDA** is contingent upon the successful completion of the selection process and the availability of allocated funding. The selection of a project proposal through this process shall not, under any circumstances, be construed as a binding obligation on the part of **CDA** to enter into a Small Grant Agreement with the selected applicant. All grant awards remain subject to final approval and budgetary considerations, as determined by UNHCR Moldova and the SVMAC Selection Committee.
- 10.3. **Small Grant Agreement:** Successful applicants will be required to sign a Small Grant Agreement with **UNHCR's partner, CDA**. This agreement will outline the terms and conditions, project deliverables, reporting schedule, and payment details.

- 10.4. **Disbursement:** Funds will be disbursed by **CDA** in **two installments**, aiming for a streamlined process:
- **First Installment (70% of total grant):** Disbursed upon signing the Small Grant Agreement.
  - **Second Installment (30% of total grant):** Disbursed upon submission and approval of a satisfactory 90% implementation of the first installment.
  - The exact percentages and conditions will be detailed in the Grant Agreement.
- 10.5. **Monitoring:** Monitoring will primarily be based on the required reports (see below). Project leads are expected to maintain open communication with the designated **CDA focal point**. Site visits or meetings may be conducted by UNHCR or CDA if deemed necessary.
- 10.6. **Reporting:** Grantees will be required to submit the following reports **to CDA, with a copy to the UNHCR focal point:**
- 10.6.1. **A Mid-term Narrative and Financial Report:** Halfway through the project period. Approval of this report triggers the second disbursement.
  - 10.6.2. **A Final Narrative and Financial Report:** Within 10 days of project completion.
  - 10.6.3. Templates and specific requirements for reporting will be provided by CDA upon grant award. Financial reports must include supporting documentation for expenditures as outlined in the Small Grant Agreement.

## 11. Timeline

- 11.1. The following is an indicative timeline:
- **Call for Proposals Launch:** March 17, 2026
  - **Application Deadline:** April 25, 2026
  - **Application Review Period:** April 26 – May 2, 2026
  - **Selection Committee Meeting & Decision:** May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026
  - **Notification of Applicants:** May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026
  - **Grant Agreement Signing (with CDA):** before May 12, 2026
  - **Project Implementation Period:** May 12 – October 31, 2026
  - **Mid-term Reporting Due:** August 15, 2026
  - **Final Reporting Due:** November 15, 2026

*Note: In the event that no applications are received by the established deadline, the Selection Committee reserves the right to extend the application period at its sole discretion, with prior notification to all relevant stakeholders.*

## 12. Contact Information

12.1. For inquiries regarding this Call for Proposals (**application process and programmatic questions**), please contact the **CDA focal point**: Svetlana Jioara at law-center@cda.md

*(Note: Questions regarding grant agreement signing and financial administration after selection should be directed to CDA, contact details will be provided to successful applicants.)*

An information session will be held on March 3. Details will be communicated via [UNHCR Moldova website](#).

### 13. Emphasis on Transparency and Inclusivity

13.1. UNHCR and the SVMAC initiative are committed to ensuring this grant program operates with the highest standards of transparency and inclusivity. The selection criteria and process are designed to be objective and fair. Applications promoting the participation and perspectives of **refugees, stateless persons**, and diverse groups within the university community are strongly encouraged. All applicants will be treated equitably, and selection decisions will be based solely on the merit of the proposals according to the published criteria. Information regarding the selection outcomes will be communicated clearly to all applicants. The administration of grants by CDA will also adhere to principles of clarity and accountability.

### 14. Confidentiality and Data Protection

14.1. UNHCR and CDA are committed to maintain strict confidentiality concerning all personal information, sensitive data, and any proprietary information acquired during the planning, execution, and evaluation of the **Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair Grant Program**. The collection, processing, storage, and dissemination of such information shall be carried out in full compliance with the applicable data protection laws and regulations of the Republic of Moldova, and in line with the UNHCR Data Protection Policy and Agreement. Any breach of confidentiality or data protection obligations shall be immediately reported to UNHCR Moldova, followed by corrective actions.

### 15. Other Safeguards

15.1. All students, researchers, and academic staff participating in projects

funded under the Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair Grant Program are required to adhere to the following safeguarding measures as a condition of their involvement in the Program:

- Demonstrate commitment to the Code of Conduct (CoC), which includes mandatory provisions on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). All individuals engaged in Program activities must sign the CoC as part of their participation requirements and complete a mandatory training on PSEA.
- Ensure the establishment of an accessible and confidential reporting mechanism for project participants, community members, and beneficiaries to report any incidents of misconduct, including allegations of SEA.
- Participate in mandatory training on the identification and referral of children at risk, if the funded project involves direct engagement with children.

15.2. Additionally, UNHCR Moldova reserves the right to conduct periodic monitoring and evaluation to verify adherence to these safeguards. Participants under the Program may also be required to attend capacity development and training sessions facilitated by UNHCR, designed to reinforce safeguarding practices and compliance with protection obligations throughout the project cycle.