# Call for Expressions of Interest

**XCEPT is commissioning research on how the transnational dimensions of conflict interact with issues related to women and girls.**

| Key information | |
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| **Award number:** | C2_G016 |
| **Programme Name:** | Cross-border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme |
| **Implemented by:** | Chemonics UK |
| **Funded by:** | UK aid, via the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) |
| **Expression of interest issue date:** | Tuesday 8 August 2023 |
| **Q&A session:** | Wednesday 23 August 2023, 14:00-15:00 BST |
| **Clarification questions deadline:** | Wednesday 30 August 2023, 18:00 BST |
| **Submission deadline:** | Wednesday 13 September 2023, 18:00 BST |
| **Email for electronic submissions:** | xcept-fund@chemonics.com |
| **Contract type/Pricing methodology:** | Fixed Price Services Agreement or Grant |
| **Likely total number of awards:** | Five |
| **Value of each award:** | £10,000 - £35,000 GBP |
| **Period of performance of each award:** | 3 - 9 months |
| **Estimated start date:** | November 2023 |
| **Procurement point of contact:** | Farieha Shah, xcept-fund@chemonics.com |

# 1 Background

The UK aid-funded Cross-border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme examines how violent conflicts connect across borders.[1] XCEPT views conflicts as complex systems that connect across borders and ensnare conflict actors and communities, intertwining the licit and illicit, the formal and informal.

Conflict, crime, and extremism undermine the stability, resilience, and security of entire regions. XCEPT argues that international policies and programmes must adapt in response – to address conflict dynamics both within and beyond state borders. This includes transcending state-centric approaches in order to tackle the transnational networks that drive and sustain conflict and to support communities coping with protracted crisis. XCEPT's research draws lessons from policy interventions – multilateral, regional, bilateral, national, and local – on conflict prevention, stabilisation, and resolution, and through comparative analysis of policy responses in varied conflict contexts.

In this vein, the XCEPT Research Fund is commissioning research on how women and girls interact with the transnational dimensions of violent conflict. In particular, the Fund is interested in research that examines the complex roles that women and girls play in cross-

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[1] "Violent conflict" can be divided into different types, including interstate (state vs. state); state vs. non-state; non-state vs. non-state; and internationalised (state vs. non-state, with an outside state intervening on behalf of one of these). See the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) definitions page; see also Allansson, M., E. Melander, and L. Themnér, 2017, "Organized Violence, 1989–2016." *Journal of Peace Research* 54 (4), pp. 574–87.

border conflict systems, and their prevention, stabilisation, and resolution. We are also interested in research on how policy or programme interventions that are designed to tackle the transnational dimensions of conflict impact women and girls, and how more inclusive and representative power-sharing arrangements might prevent or resolve violent conflict.

Building on the *UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2023-2027*, XCEPT has a particular interest in research on women and girls that can contribute to the following issues:

- Women's meaningful participation, leadership and representation in decision-making processes in efforts to prevent, reduce and resolve conflict;
- Preventing, reducing, or responding to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in cross-border conflict environments;
- The role of women and girls in systems and structures that design, implement, monitor, and evaluate lifesaving humanitarian responses in cross-border conflict environments;
- The extent to which security actors, institutions and systems are accountable to women and girls and responsive to their rights and needs in cross-border conflict environments;
- How gender can drive and exacerbate transnational threats such as terrorism and violent extremism, climate insecurity, weapons proliferation, and cybersecurity threats, and the gendered impacts of interventions designed to tackle these threats.

XCEPT also welcomes research proposals that examine the intersectionality between women and girls and other identity markers, such as youth, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, and religion. Research proposals are expected to integrate gender considerations into the entire research cycle – from research design through data collection, analysis, and evidence uptake.[2]

# 2 Scope of work

This funding opportunity seeks research that examines how the transnational dimensions of conflict interact with issues related to women and girls.

Applicants are invited to come up with a research question(s) and proposal that responds to the information provided in this document. Both individual researchers and research organisations can apply.

We expect to make awards **between £10,000 and £35,000**. The amount awarded will be commensurate with the proposed research, taking into account cost drivers such as travel, field data collection, use of innovative technologies, etc. For example, we would expect a proposal to do a desk-based review of evidence to be at the lower end of the budget range, while proposals involving field data collection might be more costly.

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[2] XCEPT GESI research planning is guided by Oxfam's adaptation of the Interagency Gender Working Group's Gender Integration Continuum. See Oxfam International, 2019, 'Integrating Gender in Research Planning'.

## Expectations

Our expectations are that projects funded under this funding opportunity will:

1) undertake novel research;
2) use rigorous and robust research methodologies, including adherence to internationally recognised ethical standards;
3) achieve policy impact and public benefit.

We are interested in a range of different methodological approaches, from desk-based reviews of evidence to analysis based on primary data collection, and any combination thereof that is appropriate to the research question. Likewise, we welcome approaches that explore single case studies or compare across multiple cases. Researchers are encouraged, though not required, to consider the potential benefits of leveraging big data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance their research.

XCEPT has in-house capacity to conduct research using satellite imagery and open-source investigations. Applicants are encouraged, though not required, to consider how these technologies could be integrated into their research, but do not need to consider budgeting for this service as it is funded separately.

This research is intended to inform policy and programme officials at the national, regional and international levels, but the research should also benefit the wider public good.

## Thematic and geographic scope

The research proposed should focus on the roles that **women and girls** play in cross-border conflict systems, and the prevention, stabilisation, and resolution of conflict. There is particular interest in research that examines relevant **policy or programme intervention(s)**, whether at the multilateral, regional, bilateral, national or local levels.

The research should focus on **geographies relevant to XCEPT**. These are: Africa, particularly West Africa, Sahel, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa; Middle East; Asia, particularly Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar; Ukraine and its bordering countries; and the Western Balkans. The research may focus on one geography or multiple geographies.

The research proposed must demonstrate a clear link to both **violent conflict, addressing its transnational dimensions,** and to **women and girls**. For example, the research may examine a particular intervention focused on preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE), or tackling organised crime, or improving governance, or increasing stability, and so on. Whatever the case, the link to violent conflict and its transnational dimensions should be clearly described in the proposal, as should the link to issues related to women and girls.

Below are some guiding themes. Applicants can respond to these themes or come up with their own.

**Women and girls and the transnational dimensions of conflict**

- How women and girls are affected by the transnational dimensions of conflict.
- The role of women as active participants in violent conflicts and the transnational networks that fuel them.
- How gender norms shift as a result of – or in response to – conflict and conflict drivers.

- The impact of border securitisation on women and girls.
- The effects of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including conflict-related sexual violence, as either a consequence of or driver of conflict.

**Inclusion-focused policy and programming**

- The link between the international Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and the transnational dimensions of conflict. The successes and challenges of the WPS agenda in contexts where conflict plays out in border areas.
- How gender plays into the challenges faced by migrant communities or host communities affected by violent conflict, and interventions aimed at supporting these groups.

**Conflict resolution and peacebuilding**

- The ways in which conflict response efforts can actively contend with the interaction between conflict and issues related to women and girls.
- The ways in which women and girls are included or excluded from cross-border conflict resolution mechanisms.
- The ability of conflict-affected communities in border areas, or those who have migrated across borders, to access peacebuilding dialogues, and how those who shape dialogues can work toward inclusion of excluded communities.
- The impact of regional conflict resolution interventions on women and girls.

## Outputs

The main research output will be a manuscript prepared for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. As appropriate, XCEPT also will consider proposals for peer-reviewed research reports geared to a policy and expert audience, for publication by the XCEPT programme. All projects should include policy-focused outputs, such as summary briefing notes and presentations to policy audiences. They should also include outputs geared for a wider public audience, such as commentaries, blogs, podcasts or videos.

Successful applicants will, at a minimum, carry out the activities/deliverables listed below. Applicants may propose additional outputs as part of their proposal.

1. **Participate in a kick-off meeting** with the XCEPT programme team, and other parties as relevant, to discuss the research approach, ways of working, reporting requirements, and other items relevant to the project.

2. **Conduct rigorous research.** This should include, as appropriate: rigorous research, adaptation of methodology as needed, and analysis and assessment of implications as research progresses.

3. **Produce a manuscript (5,000-7,000 words)** which draws together research findings in response to the research question(s).

4. **Produce a briefing note (maximum 3,000 words) for policy audiences** that summarises the findings of the research and offers considerations for policy and programming. XCEPT will support peer review, editing, and typesetting of the briefing note.

5. **Contribute to XCEPT policy and public uptake of research** through briefings to policymakers, participation in panel discussion events, and/or publication of short articles or a podcast to accompany the dissemination of the report. XCEPT will support authors in research uptake.

# 3  Who can apply

This funding opportunity is aimed at both **individual researchers** and/or **research organisations or institutions**.

Researchers and research organisations based in or from countries in the **Global South**[3] are strongly encouraged to apply, independently or in partnership / collaboration with researchers or research organisations based in the Global North. Applications by – or in partnership with – Global South researchers or research organisations will be scored more favourably (see Section 4).

Individual applicants should be **advanced practitioners, subject matter experts or academics** engaged in research, policy or programme activities. Applicants will usually hold a PhD, but other equivalent academic or professional qualifications will also be considered – for example, we encourage applications from former policymakers with several years of experience working on these issues.

Any **research organisation or institution** applying for funding must be an organisation incorporated or legally organised under the laws of its place of business and must have the proper licenses or registration or be able to obtain the necessary approvals to deliver the services required.

XCEPT encourages **collaborative research**. Proposals should consider whether the research would be strengthened through the participation of researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds, or through partnerships between academics and policy professionals.

# 4  How to apply

To apply for this opportunity, applicants are invited to fill out the accompanying **Expression of Interest Application Form**. This short form provides space (**maximum 1,500 words**) for applicants to outline their suitability for the research and to summarise how they would deliver the research. **Applicants should also include the CV of the lead researcher as an annex to the form**. An applicant may submit more than one proposal. Each proposal should be submitted separately.

Expressions of interest will be judged by a panel of experts from the XCEPT consortium and the UK Government. Applications will be judged based on:

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[3] For the purposes of this solicitation, "Global South" refers to countries listed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA). See DAC List of ODA Recipients 2022/2023.

1. Research idea and evidence gaps – 40 points.
2. Methodology – 20 points.
3. Global South participation – 20 points.
4. Experience and track record – 20 points.
   **Total – 100 points.**

A shortlist of applicants will be invited to provide a full proposal, which will involve completing an application form (approx. 3,500 words), providing past performance examples, completing due diligence forms, and submitting a detailed budget. As part of this, shortlisted applicants may be asked to participate in a call with XCEPT staff to discuss the project. Successful applicants will be contracted directly by Chemonics UK, who manage the XCEPT Research Fund.

We request only expressions of interest at this stage. The completed Expression of Interest Application Form should be emailed to XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com by the date specified in the 'Key information' table at the top of this document. Applicants will be notified as to whether or not they should submit a full proposal within two to three weeks of the application deadline; full proposals will be due approximately three weeks later. We will only be able to provide detailed feedback to unsuccessful applicants at the full proposal phase; we will not be able to do so at this initial Expression of Interest phase.

## a) Application Form

Please fill out the Application Form in **Annex 1**. This requires you to fill out some information about yourself or your organisation, as appropriate, and to complete a short eligibility checklist. For the project proposal section, you should structure your response using the following sections:

- **Research idea and evidence gaps:** (Approx. 900 words)

  - Statement of the project's focus and the problem or issue(s) it will address.
  - The questions and hypotheses the research will examine, and their relevance to policy responses, reflecting the Scope of Work (see Section 2).
  - Current evidence gaps in relation to the research idea, with reference to the relevant literature.

- **Methodology:** Methods and procedures the research will employ. (Approx. 300 words)

- **Global South participation:** The extent to which individuals and/or organisations from the Global South lead and meaningfully participate during different stages of the research cycle, from research design to data collection, analysis, validation, authoring, and uptake. (Approx. 300 words)

**Maximum 1500 words.** References to the literature should be included as footnotes, which will not count towards the word limit.

For the **budget** section of the Application Form, please provide an estimated budget for the project, showing a simple breakdown of the amount to be spent on labour and materials. Further details are not required at this stage. The budget will not be scored; however, it will be used to determine if the proposal is feasible and if it represents value for money. All cost information must be expressed in pounds sterling (GBP).

The Application Form should be submitted as a Microsoft Word or PDF document. Only applications in English will be reviewed.

### b) Curriculum Vitae (CV)

**Experience and track record:** Applicants should include a **CV** of the lead researcher(s) as an annex to the application form. This should include a list of relevant publications to which the researcher(s) contributed, if applicable. CVs should ideally be no longer than 2 pages.

The CV should be submitted as a Microsoft Word or PDF document.

# 5  Q&A session and clarification questions

To learn more about this funding opportunity, please join the **virtual question and answer (Q&A) session** on **Wednesday 23 August 2023** at **14:00-15:00 BST**. This will be an opportunity to ask questions about the opportunity. If you are interested in joining the Q&A, please confirm your attendance by completing this form: https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUrdemqrjIuGtwtcJuPNEkRi8ED0isLikf1

If you have any **clarification questions**, please ask them at the Q&A or email them to the Procurement Point of Contact by **18:00 BST on Wednesday 30 August 2023**.