

## XCEPT Call for Abstracts

# Feminist Frontiers: Rethinking Power, Agency and Responses in Conflict-Affected Borderlands

XCEPT is commissioning research that applies a feminist lens to the study of conflict-affected borderlands.

Key information	
<b>Award number:</b>	C2-G051
<b>Programme Name:</b>	Cross-border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme
<b>Implemented by:</b>	Chemonics UK
<b>Funded by:</b>	UK International Development, via the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
<b>Call for abstracts issue date:</b>	Tuesday 19 August 2025
<b>Q&amp;A session:</b>	Tuesday 2 September 2025, 14:00-15:00 BST
<b>Clarification questions deadline:</b>	Monday 8 September 2025, 18:00 BST
<b>Submission deadline:</b>	<b>Monday 15 September 2025, 10:00 BST</b>
<b>Email for electronic submissions:</b>	<a href="mailto:xcept-fund@chemonics.com">xcept-fund@chemonics.com</a>
<b>Contract type/Pricing methodology:</b>	Fixed Price Services Agreement or Grant
<b>Likely total number of awards:</b>	Three
<b>Value of each award:</b>	Up to £15,000 GBP
<b>Period of performance of each award:</b>	6 - 9 months
<b>Estimated start date:</b>	October 2025
<b>Point of contact:</b>	Benjamin Castro, <a href="mailto:xcept-fund@chemonics.com">xcept-fund@chemonics.com</a>

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## 1 Introduction

The Cross-border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends ([XCEPT](#)) research programme brings together world-leading experts and local researchers to examine conflict-affected borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and the drivers of violent and peaceful behaviour. Funded by UK International Development, XCEPT offers rigorous public good research to advance scholarship and inform policies and programmes that support peace. The programme includes the XCEPT Research Fund (XRF) to commission high-quality new research.

This XRF call for abstracts will support the development of **a series of high-quality papers that apply a feminist lens to the study of conflict-affected borderlands**, with a particular focus on power structures linked to masculinities and femininities, the gendered dynamics of agency within conflict ecosystems, and the potential for feminist approaches to inform more just and transformative peacebuilding in borderlands. Grounded in questions of power, resistance, and structural inequality, this research will contribute to advancing feminist knowledge and practice in borderland contexts and to generating more contextually grounded, equity-focused policy responses to conflict and governance challenges in fragile and contested spaces.

## 2 Background

To date, XCEPT research has shed light on how gender shapes experiences of conflict, violence, displacement, and governance. This includes studies on how women experience displacement differently from men,<sup>1</sup> and refugee women's roles in natural resource management in Uganda.<sup>2</sup> Other research focused on the impact of gender norms on conflict in the Mozambique–Tanzania borderlands,<sup>3</sup> and the contributions of pastoralist women to conflict prevention and resolution in the Kenya–Ethiopia region.<sup>4</sup> Finally, further studies have documented patterns of gender-based violence in conflict-affected borderlands in Myanmar, Jordan, and the Sudan–South Sudan borderlands.<sup>5</sup>

Although grounded in empirical evidence, this body of work has so far only partially engaged with the underlying conditions that shape certain gendered patterns, how they are sustained, and what can be done to tackle them at the root. The implication of this has been that gender has been often used descriptively – to highlight and problematise disparities – rather than analytically, to interrogate the power structures that produce them. This is where a feminist lens can add value.

Broadly defined, a feminist perspective understands patriarchy as a system of power that operates both visibly and invisibly across social, political, and economic spheres. It views all forms of violence and resistance – whether occurring in public or private spaces – as interconnected. Feminist thinking is intrinsically linked to the challenge of decolonising

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<sup>1</sup> See the XRF project pages for [Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies \(BICC\)](#) and [SIPRI](#).

<sup>2</sup> See XRF project page for [Resty Naiga](#).

<sup>3</sup> See XRF project page for [Bodhi Global Analysis](#).

<sup>4</sup> See XRF project page for [Sukanya Purkayastha](#).

<sup>5</sup> See the XRF project pages for [Henri Myrtilinen](#), [International Security and Development Center \(ISDC\)](#), and [Queen's University, Canada](#).



knowledge and praxis within and beyond exploring gender as a lens of analysis. It foregrounds intersectionality, not only framing gender as a site of marginalisation but also examining how it intersects with race, class, sexuality, and other axes of identity to shape lived experiences, embodiments, and forms of agency.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, it moves beyond documenting how different groups experience structural and systemic violence to interrogate the deeper systems that produce and sustain these conditions, as well as the forms of resistance and transformative agency that emerge in response.<sup>7</sup> For instance, a gendered analysis of displacement might identify women's disproportionate caregiving burdens or their heightened risk of violence in displacement camps, leading to calls for improved protection services. A feminist lens, however, asks why displacement mechanisms – such as refugee registration or humanitarian aid delivery – often reproduce gendered and racialised hierarchies. It exposes how some forms of leadership and coping strategies are undervalued, and how assumptions about vulnerability intersect with broader systems of power, including patriarchy, racism, classism, and colonial legacies. In short, gendered analysis focuses on the outcomes and lived experiences of inequality, while feminist analysis examines the power structures that produce and sustain it, and the subversive agencies that emerge to challenge these.

### 3 Description of the research to be commissioned

XCEPT is commissioning research that explores how borderland conflict is gendered – not only in its impacts, but also in its underlying causes and modes of governance. We seek to deepen engagement with questions of power, resistance, and agency, both within borderlands and across borders.

#### Guiding research questions

This call for abstracts responds to findings and evidence gaps identified in recent reviews of XCEPT research and the wider academic and grey literature. It seeks to advance feminist and intersectional analysis of conflict-affected borderlands. **Applicants are invited to submit an abstract that explores one of the below questions and themes.** Abstracts should include a refined research question (or questions) to frame the proposed research.

#### a) In what ways do ideas and practices of masculinity and femininity shape power structures and conflict in borderlands?

XCEPT research on borderland conflict has often treated gender as a secondary or thematic concern – primarily linked to the vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls in domains such as migration, protection, or service provision.<sup>8</sup> While these are critical entry points, this framing tends to treat gender as a variable affecting individuals, rather than as a structural force embedded in conflict dynamics. As a result, the underlying roles of

<sup>6</sup> Enloe C. [“Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics”](#). Berkeley: University of California Press. 2014; Lucas SD. [“The Primacy of Narrative Agency: A Feminist Theory of the Self”](#). PhD Thesis, Department of Philosophy, University of Sydney, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Allen KR. [“Feminist theory, method, and praxis: Toward a critical consciousness for family and close relationship scholars”](#). *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 40 (3). 2022.

<sup>8</sup> See XCEPT project pages for [Jindal Global University \(JGU\)](#), [SIPRI](#), and [Bartels](#).



masculinities, femininities, and the institutional reproduction of gendered norms often remain underexamined.<sup>9</sup>

Existing feminist research shows that competing masculinities – those of armed actors, traditional authorities, or cross-border traders – are central to the governance of violence and control.<sup>10</sup> Femininities, in turn, are often policed or strategically mobilised to uphold social hierarchies, for instance through expectations around caregiving, respectability, or deference. These dynamics are particularly pronounced in borderlands, where governance is negotiated through overlapping formal and informal systems, and state presence is often partial or contested.<sup>11</sup>

To unravel these complexities, **XCEPT invites contributions that mobilise a feminist perspective to interrogate the production and reproduction of masculinities and/or femininities within conflict-affected borderlands.** This includes exploring how gendered identities shape authority, legitimise violence, and reinforce exclusion in ways that are specific to – and often intensified in – borderland settings.

## b) How does gender shape agency within conflict-affected borderlands and how is this reflected in the ways communities or actors navigate, resist or transform structural conditions?

XCEPT's research has documented how conflict disproportionately impacts women and girls, particularly through patterns of displacement, gender-based violence, and limited access to protection and services.<sup>12</sup> Among XCEPT's body of work, instances of women's agency within conflict ecosystems have also been identified.<sup>13</sup> Yet these experiences have mostly been treated as isolated instances of coping or survival, rather than interpreted as political or transformative. A feminist approach challenges this framing by insisting that agency must be understood in relation to structural inequalities — as shaped by, and at times subverting, dominant gender, class, and racial hierarchies. For example, research on women's roles in checkpoint governance in Nigeria,<sup>14</sup> or civil resistance in Mali and Algeria,<sup>15</sup> shows how women creatively engage with — and push back against — militarised, patriarchal systems. Scholars have also noted how women play crucial roles in navigating kinship obligations or forging relational protection strategies.<sup>16</sup>

Feminist scholars have highlighted how framing gender primarily through the lens of marginalisation and vulnerability risks obscuring the diverse and often strategic ways that

<sup>9</sup> Puechguirbal N. "[The Cost of Ignoring Gender in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations: A Feminist Perspective](#)". *Amsterdam Law Forum* 4. 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Stern O. [Evidence synthesis: Women and cross-border trade in Africa during times of conflict](#). XCEPT, 2024; Korf B and Raeymaekers T. "[Introduction: Border, Frontier and the Geography of Rule at the Margins of the State](#)", in *Violence on the Margins: States, Conflict, and Borderlands*, Korf B and Raeymaekers T, eds. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis C. "[Gendering Borderlands: A Research Agenda](#)". *Changing Character of Conflict Platform*.

<sup>12</sup> See XRF project page for [Bodhi Global Analysis](#).

<sup>13</sup> See XRF project page for [Resty Naiga](#).

<sup>14</sup> Pearson C and Nagarajan C. "[Gendered security harms: State policy and the counterinsurgency against Boko Haram](#)". *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review* 10 (2). 2020. pp. 108-140.

<sup>15</sup> Svensson I and Finnbogason D. "[Confronting the caliphate? Explaining civil resistance in jihadist proto-states](#)". *European Journal of International Relations* 27 (2). 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Stallone K. "[Love in war? The strategic use of intimacy in armed conflict](#)". *Third World Quarterly* 45 (5). 2020. pp. 870-887.



women, girls and other marginalised actors operate within systems of conflict and governance.<sup>17</sup> An intersectional feminist lens enables researchers not only to observe *what* actors do, but to analyse *how* and *why* they act — and what these practices reveal about the gendered architecture of violence, authority, and legitimacy.

Building on these insights from feminist scholarship, **XCEPT invites proposals that explore how gendered actors engage with, resist, or transform the power structures that shape conflict-affected borderlands.** This includes analysing agency not only as individual action, but as a political practice that reveals and reshapes the gendered architecture of violence, authority, and legitimacy.

c) In what ways do gender-mainstreaming peacebuilding frameworks engage with the structural and intersectional dimensions of conflict-affected borderlands? What epistemic and practical limitations do these frameworks expose, and how might feminist approaches inform more transformative, contextually grounded interventions?

One of XCEPT's research priorities is to critically assess policy responses to cross-border conflict and borderland dynamics — an area where feminist analysis can offer important insights. While gender mainstreaming is now embedded in many peacebuilding and conflict response frameworks, including international agendas such as Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), questions remain about whether these frameworks meaningfully engage with the structural drivers of conflict — particularly in conflict-affected borderlands.

Feminist scholars have long critiqued these frameworks for equating gender with inclusion of women in peace processes, while neglecting to interrogate how gendered power operates within the institutions, assumptions, and structures that shape those very processes.<sup>18</sup> The result is often a form of inclusion that is symbolic rather than substantive — reinforcing dominant hierarchies and leaving the root causes of conflict intact. In other words, women's participation may be formalised in peacebuilding but they are frequently marginalised, tokenised, or sidelined as these processes unfold. Gender mainstreaming often takes a technocratic and depoliticised approach, treating gender as an administrative category rather than a site of power and struggle. Mainstream approaches may thus fail to address the intersecting forms of oppression — including class, race, age, and geopolitical marginality — that shape conflict in borderland settings.

Building on the above critique, **XCEPT invites contributions that critically assess the limits of gender-mainstreamed peacebuilding in addressing the structural and intersectional dimensions of conflict in borderland regions.** This includes analysing how policy frameworks operationalise gender, how feminist perspectives are included or excluded, and how alternative approaches might support more transformative, justice-oriented responses to borderland violence and governance.

<sup>17</sup> Isaacs T. "[Feminism and Agency](#)". *Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Volume 28: Feminist Moral Philosophy*. 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Hagen JJ. "[Queering women, peace and security](#)". *International Affairs* 92 (2). 2016. pp.313-332; Nicol A. "[Women, Peace and Strategy: Why Security Doesn't Fix the Issue](#)". *Modern Diplomacy*. 7 November 2024; Buchanan C and Daley S. "[Missing in Action: Inclusive Conflict Prevention](#)". *ISF Women, Peace, and Security Helpdesk*. March 2025.



## Geographic scope

The proposed research should concentrate on conflict-affected borderlands in XCEPT's core geographies:

- The Middle East, especially Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen
- The Horn of Africa, especially Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia
- Coastal West Africa and the Sahel
- Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Myanmar

Research may focus on a single region or span multiple regions. Proposals that address other geographies will be considered, with particular interest in research that offers comparative value for XCEPT's core areas of focus.

## Expected outputs

The primary output of each award will be a high-quality paper prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed academic journal. Successful applicants also will be expected to produce a public-facing output — such as a commentary or blog post — to share key insights with broader audiences, such as policymakers, practitioners, and borderland communities.

XCEPT will offer technical review and feedback throughout the process. XCEPT also will support contributors to showcase their research at events, webinars and in private briefings to policy stakeholders, as relevant. Finally, XCEPT will work with author(s) to enable open access publication, in line with FCDO requirements.<sup>19</sup>

## 4 Funding levels

We anticipate funding **three applicants for full paper development**. However, this is indicative only. The final number of awards may be higher or lower, depending on the quality and strategic fit of the proposals received. Final decisions will be made by the Selection Committee, which will take into account the overall balance and diversity of the portfolio, including thematic coverage and geographic focus.

We anticipate funding individual papers up to **£15,000**. In exceptional cases, a slightly higher budget may be considered where there is a clear and compelling justification, for example, related to the complexity or scope of the proposed research, data collection, or authorship arrangements.

## 5 Who can apply

Papers may be authored individually or co-authored. To be eligible for this opportunity, the **lead author must meet the criteria below**.

- **Mandatory.** Hold a PhD in a relevant discipline (e.g. Gender Studies, Political Science, International Relations, Anthropology, Economics, Development Studies, or a related field).

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<sup>19</sup> See FCDO's (formerly DFID's) [Open and Enhanced Access Policy](#).





- **Mandatory.** Have at least one publication in a peer-reviewed journal, preferably in the fields of feminist, gender, or conflict studies.
- Demonstrate a strong track record of conducting independent, high-quality research – preferably using a feminist lens in or on conflict-affected settings, borderlands, or transnational political economy.
- Have excellent written English skills, with the ability to present complex ideas clearly and concisely.
- Be available to carry out the research and submit deliverables within the expected timeframe, as outlined in the ‘Key Information’ section of this document.

To be eligible for this opportunity, **the lead author must meet all mandatory criteria.** Failure to meet any mandatory requirement will result in exclusion from further consideration. **There are no formal qualification requirements for co-authors.** The knowledge, expertise, and qualifications of all authors will be taken into account when evaluating the proposal.

Researchers based in or from countries in the **Global South** are strongly encouraged to apply, independently or in co-authorship with researchers based in the Global North.<sup>20</sup>

We expect to **enter into a contract with an individual.** In exceptional circumstances, a contract with an institution can be issued. (See Section 8 for more information.)

Applicants must indicate in the abstract submission whether **ethical review** (e.g., for human subjects research) is required from an Institutional Review Board (or equivalent ethics review body). The applicant will be responsible for obtaining such approval and provide relevant proof to XCEPT before any funds can be dispersed.

## 6 How to apply

To apply, applicants should prepare and submit the following documents:

- **Application form.** Applicants should complete the Application Form, which requires basic information about the researcher(s) and also includes:
  - **A research abstract (400 words)** that clearly demonstrates how the proposed project engages with one of the research questions outlined in the call through a feminist lens. The abstract should articulate how this perspective fills an evidence gap, offers deeper insight into the dynamics of conflict in borderland contexts, and how it can inform more effective, inclusive, and equitable responses.
  - **A research development and publication plan (300 words)** detailing the intended plan for paper development (including data collection and resources), quality assurance processes, ethical considerations (including the plan for

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<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this call, a ‘Global South researcher’ refers to an individual who is a national of a country that is a recipient of official development assistance (ODA) ([see OECD list here](#)), that is based in an ODA-recipient country (or has been displaced from one in the past several years), and is conducting research in or on an ODA-recipient country.



ethical review), academic journal(s) targeted for publication, and the type of complementary public-facing output to be issued.

- **Indicative budget** that outlines a high-level breakdown of costs with accompanying justification.

The Application Form should be submitted as a Microsoft Word document. Only applications in English will be reviewed. Footnote references will not count towards the word limit.

- **Curriculum Vitae (CV).** Applicants should include a CV of the 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. If you are applying as a team, then a CV should be submitted for each co-author.
- **Proof of peer-reviewed publication.** Applicants must provide evidence of at least one peer-reviewed journal article authored or co-authored by the lead author. Acceptable forms of evidence include: a PDF of the full article; a direct link to the published version (ensuring it is not behind a paywall); a formal acceptance letter from the journal. Please ensure the article is accessible in full to reviewers. The subject matter preferably should relate to feminist, gender, or conflict studies. If you are applying as a team, then only the lead applicant need submit proof of peer-reviewed publication.

The completed Application Form, CV(s) and proof of peer-reviewed publication must be submitted via email to [XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com](mailto:XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com) by the date specified in the 'Key information' table at the top of this document. **Applications must indicate in the subject line of the email the following "C2-G051 Feminist frontiers + [Name of applicant]"**.

Applications may be submitted individually or collaboratively. Applicants may submit more than one proposal, but no author will receive more than one award. Each proposal should be submitted separately.

## 7 How will your application be assessed

Applications will be evaluated by a Selection Committee based on the criteria below.

**Please note that this award criteria should be considered as a guide only.**

Evaluation criteria	Scoring
Quality and originality of the research idea, including clarity of the research question(s), conceptual framework, applicability of findings to broader contexts, and potential to expand the field	<b>40</b>
Relevance to the themes, questions and XCEPT focus geographies described in this call	<b>20</b>
Feasibility and credibility of the research and publication plan	<b>15</b>
Experience and track record of the researcher(s)	<b>25</b>
<b>Total score</b>	<b>100</b>





XCEPT particularly welcomes proposals that offer comparative analysis or clearly demonstrate the applicability of findings to broader contexts; draw from and connect different disciplines and academic debates; and include meaningful contributions by Global South scholars or practitioners.

Please note that, in addition to the strength of individual submissions, some decisions may be made on a strategic basis across the programme, for example, based on geography or thematic area or to promote equity and inclusion.

FCDO requires all award holders to be subject to **due diligence and risk assessment**. Only shortlisted applicants will be asked to submit due diligence forms, such as references of past performance and, as relevant, a Duty of Care Self-Assessment Form. No award decision will be taken before this process is complete.

Applicants will be notified by XCEPT regarding selection within one month of the submission deadline. We will only be able to provide detailed feedback to successful applicants.

## 8 Contracting

Successful applicants will be contracted directly by Chemonics UK, which manages the XRF. Awards for this call are designed to be **contracted directly with individual researchers**. In exceptional circumstances, for example where a researcher cannot take on an individual contract, a contract with an institution may be issued.

The research awardee is responsible for receiving, spending, and reporting on funds. The awardee also has primary responsibility for duty of care and safeguarding.

If joint or co-authorship is proposed, XCEPT will issue the award contract to the lead author; co-authors should be subcontracted to the lead author (or institution). If this raises significant complications, XCEPT will work with the selected awardee to determine an alternative approach.

Shortlisted applicants will be asked to provide past performance references and may be asked to participate in a call with XCEPT staff to discuss the project.

Successful applicants will be expected to report their progress on a regular basis, through quarterly reporting.

XRF awards are made under the authority of [FCDO Standard Terms and Conditions](#), and Chemonics' Supplier Code of Conduct, based on the [FCDO Code of Conduct](#).

The XRF is required to ensure that all awardees receiving FCDO funding comply with the guidance found in the regulations referenced above, as applicable to the respective terms and conditions of their awards.

FCDO retains the right to reject Chemonics' proposal of any successful applicant and terminate, in whole or in part, a subsequent award at any time.

This call does not establish an obligation for Chemonics UK to fund any activity or provide any awards to any applicants.



## 9 Q&A session and clarification questions

To learn more about this funding opportunity, please join the **virtual question and answer (Q&A) session** on the date specified in the 'Key Information' table at the top of this call.

This will be an opportunity to ask questions about this call for papers. If you are interested in joining the Q&A, please confirm your attendance by completing this form:

<https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/c951bff2-0267-432b-a278-02778523b756@7c1f24a6-7d39-452c-8237-0726e3b19a73>.

If you have any **clarification questions**, please ask them at the Q&A or email them to the Point of Contact by the deadline date specified in the 'Key Information' table at the top of this call.

## 10 Ethical and business conduct requirements

Chemonics is committed to integrity in procurement, and only selects grantees based on objective business criteria such as technical merit and value for money.

Chemonics does not tolerate fraud, collusion among applicants, falsified proposals/bids, bribery, or kickbacks. Any firm or individual violating these standards will be disqualified from this solicitation process, barred from future opportunities, and may be reported to both our Office of Business Conduct and FCDO.

Programme and Chemonics employees may not ask for, and applicants are prohibited from offering, any money, fee, commission, credit, gift, gratuity, thing of value, or compensation to obtain or reward improper favourable treatment regarding this solicitation. Any improper request from a programme employee should be reported to

[BusinessConduct@chemonics.com](mailto:BusinessConduct@chemonics.com).

Applicants responding to this Call must sign the declaration included at the end of the Application Form, to include the following as part of the proposal submission:

- Disclose any close, familial, or financial relationships with Chemonics or project staff. For example, if an offeror's cousin is employed by the project, the offeror must state this.
- Disclose any family or financial relationship with other offerors submitting proposals. For example, if the offeror's father owns a company that is submitting another proposal, the offeror must state this.
- Certify that the prices in the application have been arrived at independently, without any consultation, communication, or agreement with any other applicant or competitor for the purpose of restricting competition.
- Certify that all information in the proposal and all supporting documentation are authentic and accurate.
- Certify understanding and agreement to Chemonics' prohibitions against fraud, bribery and kickbacks.

