

Clarification questions: Women and girls in transnational conflict contexts

The XCEPT Research Fund is commissioning research on how the transnational dimensions of conflict interact with issues related to women and girls. The call for expressions of interest opened on 8 August 2023. A Q&A was held on 23 August 2023. The deadline for clarification questions was 30 August 2023.

Below you will find all the clarification questions asked – both during the Q&A and via email – and our responses (in [blue](#)). The answers to these questions take precedence over what is written in the original Call for Expression of Interest documents.

This document has been updated as new questions were answered.

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Collaborations and partnerships

1. If a company partners with an independent researcher who is not an employee of the company, how do I complete the Application Form for both the researcher and company?
 - If you work with a lead researcher who is an independent consultant, in Section 1 of the Application Form ('Applicant information'), please fill out Table 1 ('Individual Researcher') for the lead researcher, noting that they are an independent consultant, and also fill out Table 2 ('Organisation') for the organisational partner.
 - **Make sure you submit a CV for the lead researcher on the project.** You should do this whether you are applying as an individual researcher, as an organisation, or as a partnership between an independent consultant and an organisation.
2. Can we partner with researchers or organisations based in other countries or regions? Would a partner based in the US be acceptable?
 - Yes, you can have a partner that is based in any country, including the US.
 - Researchers and research organisations based in or from countries in the Global South¹ 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 on the 'Global South participation' criteria. To score highly on this criteria, you must demonstrate that your proposed project embeds practices which ensure equity into the design, delivery and dissemination of the research.

Multiple Submissions

3. Can an applicant submit multiple EOIs?
 - Yes, you can submit more than one proposal. You should submit a separate EOI application form for each proposal.
4. Can a researcher appear in multiple applications with different organisations? What is the maximum number of applications someone can submit as a lead applicant?
 - Yes, the same researcher can be part of several proposals with different partners. There is no limit on the number of proposals you can submit. You should submit a separate EOI application form for each proposal.

Eligibility and scoring criteria

5. Can a current PhD student with relevant work experience apply?

¹ 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](#).



- Yes, anyone can apply. 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.
6. Given that I hold an MA rather than a PhD, yet possess experience in conducting research pertaining to vulnerable groups, would I still meet the eligibility criteria to apply for this call? [Question added 1 September]
- Anyone can apply, although we would expect individual applicants to 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.
7. Can peacebuilding organisations who have a track record in conflict projects apply if they are partnering with a research organisation?
- Yes. We encourage collaborative research, including partnerships between researchers and policy and programme professionals. In your application, please describe how the partnership you are proposing will lead to high-quality, policy-relevant research.
8. Can non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with research expertise apply?
- Yes, NGOs with research expertise can apply.
9. If I apply only as an individual researcher rather than through an organisation, will that affect my scoring or evaluation?
- Not necessarily. One of the scoring criteria is ‘Experience and track record’. You will score more highly on that criteria if you can show that you have the required experience and track record to be able to effectively carry out the research you are proposing.
10. If an organisation applies, will the ‘experience and track record’ be assessed on the basis of the team members’ experience? Or will you be assessing the organisation’s experience?
- We will assess both. For applications by organisations we will assess both the organisation’s track record and the lead researcher’s CV.

‘Global South’ participation scoring criteria

11. Does Ukraine count as the Global South?
- Yes. 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).² Ukraine is one of those countries.

12. Does Egypt count as the Global South? [Question added 1 September]
 - Yes. See the list referenced in the answer to the previous question.
13. May you further explain what is meant by “Global South participation”? Could you share details on how “Global South participation” is scored? [Question added 1 September]
 - 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).³
 - Researchers and research organisations based in or from countries in the Global South 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 on the ‘Global South participation’ criteria.
 - For this criterion, the highest marks will go to proposals in which one or more of the following conditions are met:
 - i. The prime implementing partner is a Global South partner (OECD DAC recipient) or, if a Northern partner is the prime, then local subawards make up >50% of the budget;
 - ii. The Global South partner is conducting research in the same country as its primary place of business, or is conducting research in a different Global South country located in the same region;
 - iii. Research is co-created with local communities using participatory approaches;
 - iv. The project provides capacity strengthening to local partners.
 - Beyond the above, we are looking for research projects that embed practices which ensure equity into the design, delivery and dissemination of research.
 - We encourage everyone to apply even if they do not anticipate scoring very highly in certain criteria as they might score highly in other criteria.

Budgets

14. Could you share your indirect rate?
 - Applicants need to follow their organisation's established rates. At this stage, we only need a summary budget. Only applicants who are shortlisted to go through to the next stage will be asked to submit a detailed budget.
15. Are staff costs (e.g. a Research Assistant with expertise in a specific geographical area) eligible?
 - Yes. Please include these costs in your budget as appropriate.

² See [DAC List of ODA Recipients 2022/2023](#).

³ See [DAC List of ODA Recipients 2022/2023](#).



16. Can overhead costs be included in the budget?

- Yes, you can include your overhead costs as part of your budget. 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.

17. What is the maximum an applicant can apply for?

- The budget range for research projects is between £10,000 to £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.

18. Would you consider applications for research with a smaller scope/budget than described in the call for proposals?

- We will consider applications that propose to do less than the full set of activities/deliverables listed in the 'Call for EOIs' document, especially where those proposals are pitched at the lower end of the budget range. Such proposals may score lower than proposals that do commit to delivering the full set of activities/deliverables. Proposals that do not commit to producing the main research output – a manuscript prepared for publication in a peer-reviewed journal or as an XCEPT research report – will not be considered.
- **Please list the activities / deliverables you intend to deliver in Section 3 ('Project proposal') of the Application Form.**

19. At what stage will the budget proposal be due? It is not due with the expression of interest, right? [Question added 1 September]

- At this stage, we only need a summary budget, to be included at the bottom of the Application Form. Only applicants who are shortlisted to go through to the next stage will be asked to submit a detailed budget.

20. If a lead researcher applies as part of an institution, but isn't necessarily a salaried employee, or might not be at some point during the phase of time that would be covered over the research project, can the budget cover labour costs for lead researchers as well? [Question added 1 September]

- You will have to work this out with the institution you intend to apply through. We have different contracting mechanisms – for example, we can contract lead researchers as independent consultants. If applying through your institution, we would expect your institution to determine the costs to be included in the budget.

21. If I am the Primary Investigator (PI) and I work at a university with fixed hours and work responsibilities, could I ask for money for a teaching buy out to conduct this research, write up and manage the team etc? Or is it expected that my organisation will cover my labour? [Question added 1 September]

- You will need to work this out with your university. We are ok with you including labour costs as part of your proposed budget. We have previously made awards both to researchers who have had their labour costs covered by their universities, and to those who have not had their labour costs covered by their universities.



Number of awards

22. Will XCEPT award only 5 projects among all of the regions?
- We expect to issue a minimum of five awards. We may issue more, depending on how strong the applications are. In theory, all the awards could be focused on only one region, but that is unlikely.
 - Another factor determining the number of awards made will be the budget proposed for each award. For example, if there are a number of strong applications that each propose a budget of £10,000, then we would be able to fund a larger number of awards.

Geographic Scope

23. The Horn of Africa is a geographical illustration but sometimes is a bit confusing – Uganda is sometimes considered East Africa but not Horn of Africa. Is XCEPT interested in research on Uganda?
- Yes. We are interested in research on conflict-affected areas across Africa, including Uganda.
 - Geographies relevant to XCEPT 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.
24. Would Central Asia (for example Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) fall within the relevant geographies?
- This region is not currently a focus for XCEPT. However, applicants may focus on this region if they can show that there is a clear link to the transnational dimensions of violent conflict *in an XCEPT geography*, and to issues related to women and girls.
25. My research is going to be in the Middle East, specifically in Lebanon. Is it relevant?
[Question added 1 September]
- It may be relevant. You must show that there is a clear link to the transnational dimensions of conflict and to issues related to women and girls.
26. What qualifies as 'cross-border': cross-border *within* Yemen, across de facto borders; or cross-border between Yemen and other neighbouring countries?
[Question added 1 September]
- To bound the scope of XCEPT, we define 'borders' as internationally recognised political borders, so a project that focuses on lines of control within Yemen would not necessarily qualify. You would need to show a clear link between the areas and/or topic you are proposing to study and cross-border dynamics, where 'border' is understood as internationally recognised political borders. So examining links between conflict in Yemen and neighbouring countries would be acceptable.



27. The geographic scope in the Call for Expressions of Interest includes "Africa, particularly West Africa, Sahel, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa." In the August 23 PowerPoint presentation, slide 7 includes a map labelled "XCEPT research focuses on borderland dynamics and how conflicts connect across borders" that shows parts of these regions shaded as "Focus countries". Our question is: are these shaded countries the only countries and/or border regions that will be funded or is XCEPT looking to broaden those focus areas to include other parts of the regions listed in the Call for EOI? [Question added 1 September]

- The countries detailed in the map in the slides shared are not the only countries or regions XCEPT is interested in – this map only serves as an illustration of some XCEPT geographies. For this call, XCEPT is interested in research proposals on the following geographies: 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.

Thematic Scope

28. Must the research be done in a borderland with an active conflict?

- No, the research does not need to focus on a borderland with an active conflict (nor does it need to focus on a borderland per se). XCEPT is interested in the transnational dimensions of conflict, including the flows and networks of people, weapons and resources that connect conflicts in different parts of the world. It might be that you examine these flows and networks in a location that is not an active conflict zone, but it might be linked to violent conflict in another area – you would just need to show the link in your proposal.

29. Would a study focusing on refugee settlements be eligible?

- Yes, as long as you can show that there is a clear link to the transnational dimensions of conflict and to issues related to women and girls.

30. When you talk about 'Novel Research' are you specifically looking for innovative and unusual themes (related to women and girls and transnational conflict)?

- By 'novel research' we mean *new* research. Your proposal should describe current evidence gaps in relation to your research idea, with reference to the relevant literature, and show how the research you are proposing will fill an evidence gap and is therefore new.

31. Given that XCEPT does so much research already, are other forms of data available for the research team that could be analysed, assessed, or explored through the women and girls lens?

- Potentially yes. XCEPT has already gathered a large amount of data, including satellite imagery. There may be scope for accessing this data once an award is made. However, applicants should not rely on having access to this data as a key part of their application.

32. The call document states that XCEPT seeks research that "examines the complex roles that women and girls play in cross-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". Is it required for the study to encompass all of the aspects mentioned, or is it possible to concentrate on a specific dimension? [Question added 1 September]

- The study does not need to encompass all of the aspects mentioned, as long as the research proposed demonstrates a clear link to both violent conflict, addressing its transnational dimensions, and to women and girls. Applicants are invited to come up with a research question(s) and proposal that responds to the information provided in the Call for EOIs document.

33. Do we have to choose one of the issues mentioned in the call document? E.g. 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; etc. [Question added 1 September]

- You do not have to choose one of these issues; these are indicative themes that XCEPT is interested in. Applicants can respond to these themes or come up with their own.

Policy relevance

34. The 'Call for EOIs' documents states: "There is particular interest in research that examines relevant policy or program intervention(s), whether at the multilateral, regional, bilateral, national or local levels." Do you mean existing policies / programmes or potential ones?

- If you are assessing interventions, we would expect you to examine ones that have already happened, or ones that are ongoing. If you intend to focus on an intervention that has not yet commenced, you must justify this focus in your proposal.

35. Can you expand on what you are looking for in terms of policy impact? In some locations, such as Afghanistan, it is difficult to collaborate with national authorities. Our focus would be more on capacity building of local organisation (not necessarily policy driven).

- XCEPT seeks to produce research that is useful to policy and programme audiences. All our research should answer the 'so what?' question. So we are looking for research that has policy impact, whether it's supporting the UK government, who are the primary users of the research, or key bilateral or multilateral partners. We are also interested in research that supports programme partners, such as NGOs, to improve the way they work. In your proposal you should describe how your research will be useful to the wider policy and programming community.



Methods

36. Is there flexibility in choosing the methodology for the study? It is not specified whether qualitative, quantitative, or other approaches are preferred? [Question added 1 September]
- There is flexibility in choosing the methodology for the study. Applicants should choose the methodological approaches that best suits the type of research question(s) selected.

Incorporating satellite/remote methods

37. For those who intend to include satellite Imagery in their proposed approach, will XCEPT offer support with the infrastructure?
- Yes. XCEPT has in-house capacity to procure and analyse satellite imagery, as needed. Applicants do not need to consider budgeting for this service as it is funded separately.
38. Would it be possible to share more information about the in-house capacity you offer in terms of satellite imagery and open-source data/investigations? Does the satellite imagery cover all of the following countries: Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia? And what is the level of resolution? Are the open-source investigations you offer related to the use of satellites, or open-source datasets, or something else? [Question added 1 September]
- XCEPT works with Satellite Applications Catapult (SAC) to procure both satellite imagery and analysis of satellite data. SAC helps us to task satellites or access imagery archives, with varying levels of resolution. We have access to commercially available imagery and archives – so in terms of the regions mentioned, we are bound by what is available commercially, usually via Maxar, Planet, and Airbus. Many of the places mentioned should be covered, but we would have to confer with SAC to determine feasibility at the next stage. For now, you can design your questions around what you would like access to and if your proposal is successful, we can work with SAC to determine what is available within a reasonable budget.
 - The support we offer for open-source investigations is not only related to satellite, it can involve other data sources too. We would procure this data and analysis based on what is needed.
 - Applicants do not need to consider budgeting for these services as they are funded separately.

Citations and footnotes

39. Is there room for flexibility in terms of including references to the literature? Could we potentially opt for a reference list at the end of the document instead of using footnotes, as indicated in the call? [Question added 1 September]
- We prefer footnotes but applicants may use footnotes or endnotes. We encourage applicants to directly reference literature to effectively convey evidence gaps, rather than including only a bibliography.



40. Should the proposal in our EOI include citations or footnotes to any literature we reference, and if so, does this count toward the total word limit? [Question added 1 September]
- Applicants are encouraged to include citations or footnotes to reference literature when examining evidence gaps. References in footnotes are not included in the word count.

Deliverables/outputs

41. Can the briefing note mentioned in the deliverables be in the form of a policy brief?
- Yes, this is a different way of referring to the same thing. The briefing note / policy brief should be a maximum of 3,000 words and should be designed for policy audiences, to summarise the findings of the research and offer considerations for policy and programming.
42. Does the research have to include policy recommendations? [Question added 1 September]
- No, the research does not have to result in policy recommendations. However, please note that XCEPT seeks to produce research that is useful to policy and programme audiences. All our research should answer the 'so what?' question. So we are looking for research that has policy impact, whether it's supporting the UK government, who are the primary users of the research, or key bilateral or multilateral partners. We are also interested in research that supports programme partners, such as NGOs, to improve the way they work. In your proposal you should describe how your research will be useful to the wider policy and programming community.

Considerations for phase 2 of the application process

43. If we propose a collaborative team application, do we need to identify who is the PI and Co-PI to establish where the funds are transferred and which institution is contracted with XCEPT?
- At the EOI phase, please identify who will be the Principal Investigator and, if relevant, Co-Principal Investigator, as this will affect how we assess your application.
 - At the second phase (full proposal), you will need to determine which organisation is the lead, as that organisation will need to fill out the due diligence forms.
44. In terms of hiring local co-researchers, translators, etc., do you expect us to have contacted some potential candidates before the 13 September deadline or would it be okay to have just the PI and Co-PI and then contact more people if the grant is awarded?
- You can identify non-key personnel (e.g. translators) after the contract is awarded. You will need to ensure that the time it takes to identify non-filled positions/roles is factored into your workplan assumptions.
45. Should we already have Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval done by the full application phase, if a full application is invited?



- We do not expect you to have full IRB approval by the second application phase. You can build IRB approval, as relevant, into your workplan once the contract is awarded.
- For those who are selected to move through to the full proposal phase, there will be a section on ethics in the application form.

Considerations if you win an award

46. Will XCEPT provide a letter that can be shared with security personnel or government authorities to allow our primary data collectors into 'restricted' zones?
- We have issued letters in the past, but it will depend on each area and the approvals required. Please note that awardees will have primary responsibility for the security and duty of care of their team during the period of the award.
47. Is there support from XCEPT in getting access to local communities?
- We expect applicants to be able to conduct the research they are proposing to do, including, as relevant, gaining access to local communities. We can support to a certain extent in the areas where we work, but the onus is on the researcher or research team.

