

XCEPT

CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT
EVIDENCE / POLICY / TRENDS

CLIMATE CHANGE, INFORMAL TRADE, AND INSTABILITY IN CONFLICT- AFFECTED BORDERLANDS

Q&A session – 05 September 2025

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An aerial photograph of a city, likely St. Louis, with a river winding through it. The image is dark blue with a grid of white lines representing streets. Ten red circles with white numbers are overlaid on the map. Circle 1 is in the upper center. Circles 2 through 10 are arranged in a horizontal line at the top right.

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Housekeeping

Q&A housekeeping



Please write any questions into the Q&A tool. You will not be able to unmute and ask questions verbally, so you must write your questions into the Q&A.



We will record this session and share it online afterwards.



We may not get to all the questions today, or there may be some that we are not able to answer immediately. In that case, we will make sure that we respond to those questions in writing within a few days of the clarification questions deadline.



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Introduction to XCEPT

About XCEPT



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**.

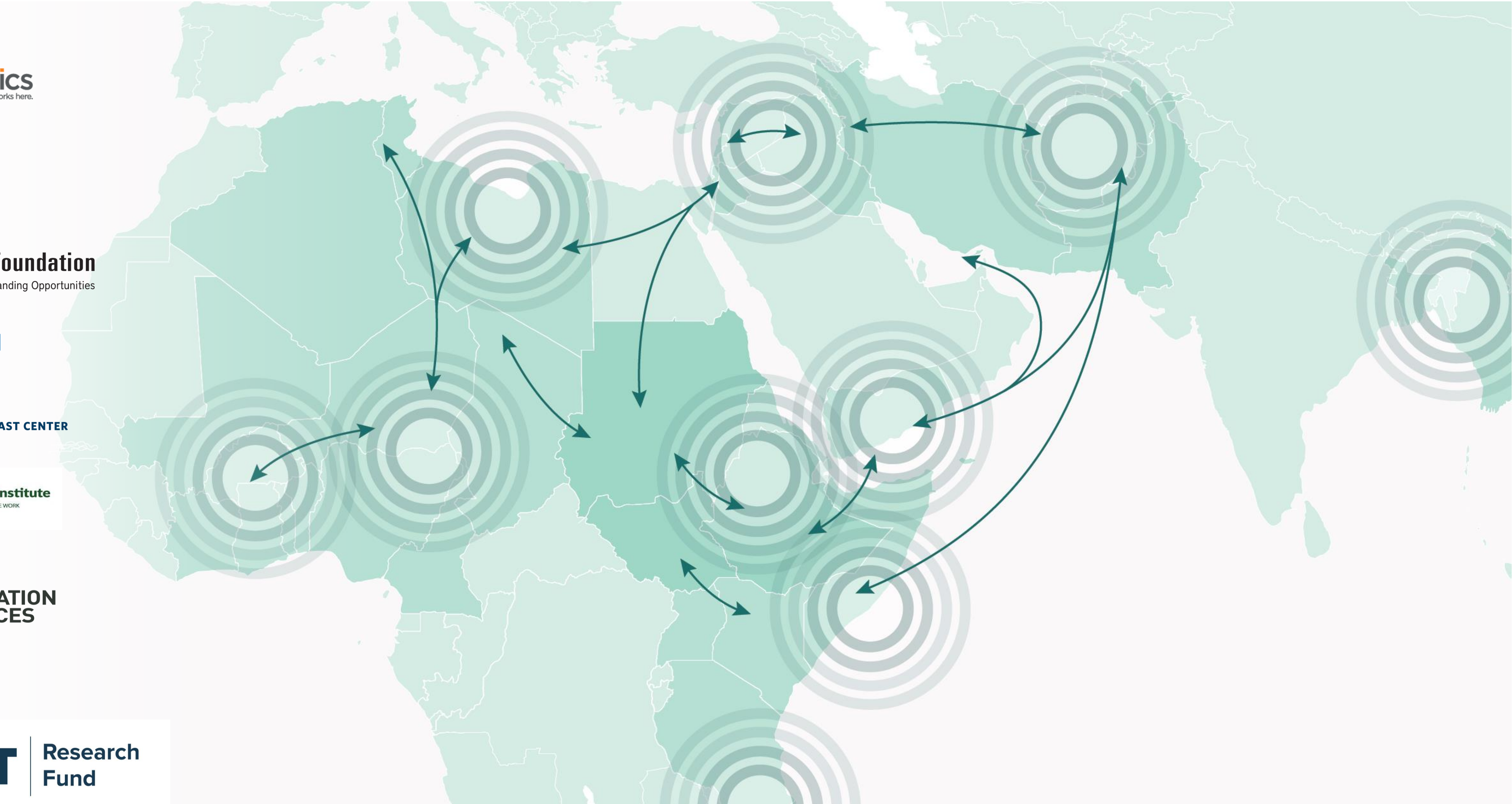


Funded by UK International Development, XCEPT offers actionable research to inform policies and programmes that support peace.



The programme includes the **XCEPT Research Fund** (XRF) to commission high-quality new research.

Research on borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and what drives violence





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About this funding opportunity

About this funding opportunity

Connecting informal cross-border trade, climate adaptation and instability

- In conflict-affected borderlands, weak or absent governance leaves communities to face climate shocks largely on their own.
- Informal trade networks can serve as vital lifelines during climate extremes.
- Armed actors may partner with local communities, acting as de facto regulators of trade and gaining legitimacy in the process.

About this funding opportunity

The consequences of these dynamics for peace, security and long-term climate resilience remain poorly understood. There is limited evidence on:

- How informal, cross-border trade functions as a **strategy for climate change adaptation** in conflict-affected borderlands
- How the expansion of informal trade networks, driven by climate extremes, might **contribute to conflict and instability**

Thematic scope

This funding opportunity seeks to fund research that considers the following interlinked research questions:

1. How do communities in conflict-affected borderlands **draw on informal, cross-border trade networks to adapt to climate extremes**? How are existing trade networks utilised or new ones formed?
2. How effective are such networks as a form of **climate change adaptation** and resilience-building?
3. Under what conditions do such informal, cross-border **trade networks fuel instability and conflict**, and what are the implications for local communities and climate adaptation?

Approach

We encourage a comparative approach that allows for examination of the three interlinked research questions through a limited number of cases.

- Case selection should be designed to facilitate **structured comparisons**.
- The successful project is expected to make **a meaningful contribution to academic debates**, while also raising **policy relevant considerations**.
- XCEPT supports researchers to integrate **remote research methods** (such as satellite data) with field data collection and other data sources.

Geographic scope

The proposed research should concentrate on XCEPT's core geographic regions, which include fragile and conflict-affected areas of:

- 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

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

Key info

Total number of awards	1
Value of each award	£120,000 GBP
Period of performance of each award	12 Months
Clarification question deadline	Tuesday 9 September 2025, 18:00 BST
Submission deadline	Tuesday 16 September 2025, 10:00 BST
Estimated start date	December 2025

Expected outputs

- **Main output:** A high-quality, peer-reviewed paper (or series), suitable for publication by the Awardee or in an academic journal.
- **Policy-focused outputs:** summary briefing notes and presentations to policy audiences.
- **Public-focused outputs:** commentaries, blogs, podcasts
- **Complementary activities:** Opportunities to present at events, webinars and policy briefings

Applicants should list the outputs they plan to produce in the Application Form

Expectations for research quality

XCEPT is a public good research programme and we expect research to meet the standards of high-quality research:

- **New and novel**
- **Use rigorous and robust research methodologies**
- **Adhere to internationally recognised ethical standards**
- **Achieve policy impact and public benefit**

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Who can apply?

Who can apply?

This funding opportunity is only open to organisations.

- Applications from **consortia, partnerships, or networks** are welcome; a lead organisation must be designated.
- **Government bodies (national, regional or local) are not eligible for this opportunity.** This exclusion does not apply to publicly funded, independent, and non-political research institutes.
- **Multilaterals** can apply.
- Applicants must name a **Principal Investigator** and Co-Investigators, if relevant.
- Researchers and research organisations based in or from countries in the **Global South** are encouraged to apply.



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How to apply?

How to apply?

Stage 1: Concept Note

To apply at the Concept Note stage, applicants should prepare and submit the following documents:

Application Form, including:

- **Concept Note** (max. 1200 words), incl. sections on: Research idea and evidence gap; methodology; outputs; team. References to literature in the footnotes will **NOT** count toward word limit.
- **Summary Budget** - high-level breakdown across major categories (e.g. personnel, activities, equipment, etc.). This should include costs related to fieldwork, editing and publication, dissemination, etc. + reasonable overheads as applicable.

Annexes:

- CVs of Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators (as relevant) (max. 3)

How to apply?

Stage Two: Project Proposal

- Shortlisted applicants will be asked to complete a full technical application, providing past performance examples, completing due diligence forms, and submitting a detailed budget and workplan.

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**How will we assess
your application?**

Scoring criteria

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
Research idea and evidence gaps <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relevance to the themes, questions, and XCEPT focus geographies described in this call.• Clarity of the proposal, clear description of the conceptual framework, and precision of the research question(s).• Originality of the proposed topic, awareness of existing literature and evidence gaps.• Consideration and integration of relevant gender dimensions.	40
Methodology <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aptness of the methods proposed, including rigour and robustness of the empirical strategy to address research questions and test hypotheses and of the approach to data collection and analysis.• Feasibility of the methodological approach, based on the time and budget proposed.• Robustness of quality assurance processes built into the design, implementation, writing, and dissemination of the research proposed.• Aptness and robustness of approach to ensuring ethical research standards throughout the project cycle.• Integration of gender- and conflict-sensitive research practices from design to implementation.• Feasibility and realism of plan for accomplishing the deliverables and delivering on time and within budget.• Relevance and aptness of proposed outputs for academic and policy impact.	30
Research team <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic credentials and experience delivering research related to the research idea.• Track record using the proposed methodology.• Relevance of existing networks for research access.• Evidence of ability to produce rigorous, high-quality research outputs.• Extent to which individuals and/or organisations from the Global South lead and meaningfully participate across the research cycle, from research design to data collection, analysis, authoring, and uptake.	30



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Timeline

Timeline



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XCEPT support for Fund awardees

Tailored support for Fund awardees

- Research management and implementation
- Remote methods support
- Research engagement and policy uptake
- Quality assurance and expert consultation
- Publications support and research communications
- Joining the XCEPT research community



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Q&A

XCEPT

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Contact information:

XCEPT Fund team – XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com