

XCEPT Call for Researchers

TRACE: Checkpoints, Conflict, and the Politics of Circulation

XCEPT seeks researchers with expertise in conflict-affected borderlands to contribute to a comparative study on the roles and dynamics of checkpoints.

Key information	
Award number:	C2-G033
Programme Name:	Cross-border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme
Implemented by:	Chemonics UK
Funded by:	UK International Development, via the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
Call issue date:	Thursday 11 September 2025
Submission deadline:	Wednesday 24 September 2025, 10:00 BST
Email for electronic submissions:	xcept-fund@chemonics.com
Likely total number of researchers to be contracted:	Three
Value of each award:	Up to £15,000 each
Length of project:	9 months
Estimated start date:	October 2025
Point of contact:	Jenny Sharp, xcept-fund@chemonics.com

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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 invites researchers with expertise in conflict-affected borderlands to contribute to a comparative study on the roles and dynamics of checkpoints. Selected researchers will participate in a 2.5-day **collaborative workshop** (18–20 November 2025), support the development of a **workshop report**, and develop a **case study paper** for publication, supported by funding of £10,000–£15,000. This initiative offers a unique opportunity to engage in cutting-edge research, share insights across geographies, and shape scholarly understanding of borderland governance.

2 Background

XCEPT is conducting a comparative research project on checkpoints in conflict-affected borderlands. Checkpoints are central to the movement of people and goods, shaping both local livelihoods and wider systems of authority and governance. Yet, their roles differ greatly across contexts, ranging from revenue collection to security control to embedded systems of redistribution and authority.

Researchers selected to work on this project will be expected to:

- Take stock of the diverse roles that checkpoints play across XCEPT's core geographies.
- Co-develop a typology of checkpoint geographies as a shared framework for comparative research.
- Examine the moral economy of borderland governance, asking how roadblocks reflect and reshape alternative systems of authority, redistribution, and exchange.

As part of the research process, an 8-person **workshop** will be held between 18–20 November 2025 in Nairobi, Addis Ababa or Kampala (final location to be confirmed). It will be convened by Project Lead Peer Schouten, with participation by other tax and roadblocks experts. The workshop aims to collaboratively develop a comparative framework for understanding checkpoints in conflict-affected borderlands through shared research insights and mapping exercises. The workshop will be highly participatory, drawing on the experiences and perspectives of researchers embedded in conflict-affected contexts, as well as academics working the field. Researcher costs associated with the workshop will be covered by XCEPT.

Following the workshop, each researcher will develop a **case study paper** for potential publication in the *Roadblocks & Revenues* Working Paper series, hosted by DIIS, ICTD, and the Centre on Armed Groups. XCEPT will provide funding of approximately £10,000–



£15,000 per case study, with the possibility of additional support to further develop these papers into peer-reviewed journal articles.

Project and workshop leadership

The project and workshop will be led by **Dr Peer Schouten**, Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) and Associate Researcher at the International Peace Information Service (IPIS). Dr Schouten is the award-winning author of *Roadblock Politics: The Origins of Violence in Central Africa* and leads current projects on the political economy of checkpoints. With extensive field experience in Central Africa and beyond, he brings deep expertise on the governance, trade, and political dynamics of roadblocks in conflict-affected regions.

3 Researcher expectations and guidance

Before the workshop

Before the workshop, the researcher is expected to:

- Familiarise themselves with the background paper and selected key readings (to be shared upon selection).
- Collect the working knowledge necessary to produce a preliminary 'mapping' of roadblocks in their context, to be presented at the workshop.
- Engage in an onboarding call with the lead researcher to discuss any questions or issues.

During the workshop

During the workshop, researchers will be expected to:

- Share insights from their own research on checkpoints, trade and conflict, and borderland governance, through short presentations or guided discussions.
- Contribute actively to comparative exchanges across geographies.
- Help refine the checkpoint typology framework and identify key cross-cutting themes, including by engaging in the hands-on work of producing hand-drawn maps of routes, borders, checkpoints, hubs, etc.
- Provide illustrative examples and case material for inclusion in a workshop report.
- Prepare to develop their case study into a more detailed research paper supported by XCEPT funding.

The lead researcher and other academic experts at the workshop will offer a safe space for sharing tentative ideas and sensitive details in an open environment marked by equality; they will bring participants up to speed on the topic, evolving debates, and state-of-the-art questions; they will provide methodological guidance, catered theoretical feedback and literature suggestions, and will also present their own evolving work for feedback.



Workshop details:

- **Dates:** 18–20 November 2025 (arrival on 17th November and finishing at lunchtime on the 20th).
- **Location:** Nairobi, Addis Ababa, or Kampala (final decision to be based on participant locations).
- **Format:** Facilitated discussions structured around the checkpoint typology framework, complemented by case presentations and comparative exchanges.
- **Costs:** Travel, accommodation, and meals will be covered for all selected participants during the workshop.

Participants: Project Lead Peer Schouten; three invited experts; and three researchers selected through this call for applications, along with XCEPT programme staff. This group will form a research group that will come together at key moments throughout the project.

After the workshop

- Each researcher will produce a **2-page description** to feed into the workshop report (further agreed upon during the workshop). It is expected that the Project Lead will be the lead author of the workshop report and the workshop participants will be co-authors.
- Each researcher will produce a **case study paper** based on their geographic expertise, which will be developed into a working paper, and potentially an academic journal article.
- Each participant commits to the iterative and interactive process aimed at developing the papers in close dialogue with the research group.

After the workshop, the Project Lead, in coordination with the academic experts, will provide researchers with:

- A tailored list of additional reading.
- Feedback on evolving individual projects at key milestones.
- Participation in a joint, online workshoping of feedback on draft papers with the wider research group.
- Written individual peer review comments on the draft case study working papers.
- Facilitation of the peer review process of the working paper.
- Engagement with a journal to develop a Special Issue.

4 Person Specification

Applicants should:

1. Be enrolled in or have completed a PhD in a relevant discipline, such as international affairs, international development, or political science, with a focus on research in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
2. Have experience studying checkpoints, cross-border trade, or governance in conflict-affected borderlands.



3. Have first-hand research experience in at least one of XCEPT's core geographies, including:
 - a) The Middle East, especially Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen
 - b) The Horn of Africa, especially Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia
 - c) Coastal West Africa and the Sahel
 - d) Afghanistan and Pakistan
 - e) Myanmar

Those based in the region are particularly encouraged to apply.

5 How to Apply

To apply, applicants should prepare and submit the following:

1. CV (maximum 2 pages)
2. Cover note (maximum 1 page) outlining your research focus, relevant experience, and motivation for participating

The CV and cover note should be submitted via email to 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-G033 XCEPT Checkpoints + [Name of researcher]"**.

Shortlisted candidates may be invited to take part in an interview.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, so we encourage early submissions as interviews may be scheduled before the closing date.

6 Selection Process

Applications will be assessed on the relevance of their research experience, their potential contribution to cross-context comparative insights, and a balance across geographies and perspectives.

For any questions, please contact the XCEPT Research Fund Team at xcept-fund@chemonics.com

