

Frequent Asked Questions

Call for Concept Notes – Multiple Centres

The XCEPT Research Fund is commissioning research that explores the rise of multiple and competing centres in the Horn of Africa and beyond. The Call for Concept Notes opened on 27 August 2025. A Q&A was held on 8 September. The deadline for clarification questions was 11 September.

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document was published alongside the Call. It has now been updated to provide responses to questions asked during the Q&A and via email. New questions asked appear at the end of each section, under a sub-header called 'Updated FAQs'.

The answers to these questions take precedence over what is written in the original Call for Concept Notes.

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1 About XCEPT

1.1 What is 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.

XCEPT's focus on conflict-affected borderlands and how conflicts connect across borders sets us apart. We view conflicts as complex systems that connect across borders and ensnare conflict actors and communities, intertwining the licit and illicit, the formal and informal.

We argue that since conflicts are not bound by national borders, responses to conflict should not be bound by national borders either. Responses to conflict should be transnational. They should work at local, state, and regional levels and enable integrated and coordinated international responses.

Chemonics UK is the lead implementing partner for XCEPT, working with King's College London. Other core partners during the life of the programme have included: The Asia Foundation; Chatham House; Conciliation Resources; Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center; and Rift Valley Institute.

XCEPT works with many other research organisations through the XCEPT Research Fund (XRF). These include leading universities and think tanks and grassroots organisations dedicated to building peace. XCEPT offers awards to both individuals and institutions to support high-quality mixed-methods research, published in leading journals and institutional channels. We support researchers in innovative application of remote research methods alongside field data collection, pushing the boundaries of how technology can be used to track conflict dynamics.

1.2 What are examples of projects XCEPT has previously funded?

Examples of other projects funded through the XRF can be found in the 'ongoing and completed' awards section of the 'Research Fund' page on our [website](#). To search across XCEPT's research outputs, use the website's [search function](#).

2 Eligibility

2.1 Who can apply for an award?

XCEPT welcomes applications from both **individuals** and **organisations**.

Successful applicants will be responsible for receiving, managing, and reporting on the awarded funds, and must demonstrate the capability to do so in line with FCDO requirements for financial accountability and transparency. This includes maintaining appropriate financial systems and controls.

The awardee will also hold primary responsibility for **duty of care, safeguarding, and risk management** throughout the duration of the project, and must have appropriate approaches in place to manage these effectively.

Applicants should ensure that their proposed budget, and their approach to risk, safeguarding, and duty of care, are proportionate to the scale, scope, and complexity of the proposed research. These elements will be considered as part of the assessment process.

In line with these expectations, we do not anticipate awarding high value budgets to individuals acting outside of an institutional or organisational framework, unless they can clearly demonstrate the capacity to manage funds and responsibilities at that scale.

Global South researchers and research organisations are strongly encouraged to apply, independently or in partnership / collaboration with researchers or research organisations based in the Global North. Applications that include meaningful participation of Global South researchers and/or organisations will be scored more favourably.

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.

2.2 What qualifications are required for Principal Investigators?

Applicants should name a **Principal Investigator** (and Co-Investigators, as relevant). We expect Principal Investigators to be academics, subject matter experts, or advanced practitioners engaged in research, policy, or programme activities. Principal investigators will usually hold a PhD, but other equivalent academic or professional qualifications will also be considered.

2.3 Are there specific affiliation requirements for Principal Investigators?

No, Principal Investigators do not need to meet any specific affiliation requirements.

2.4 If I am applying as an individual researcher, can I apply as a team?

Yes, if you are submitting a proposal as an individual, you can apply as part of a team. However, only one lead researcher / Principal Investigator should submit the proposal. That individual will be named in the contract and will be responsible for project implementation, should the application be successful.

XCEPT prefers that co-investigators be engaged as subcontractors under the lead's contract. If this arrangement raises significant complications, then we can consider alternative mechanisms.

2.5 The call states that Global South researchers and research organisations are strongly encouraged to apply. Which researchers / organisations are considered 'Global South'?

The XRF is committed to supporting equitable research partnerships and inclusive knowledge production. We encourage Global South collaboration and projects led by or meaningfully involving researchers based in the regions under study.

For the purposes of this call, 'Global South organisation' refers to an organisation that is legally organised under the laws of, and has as its principal place of business or operations in, a country that is a recipient of official development assistance (ODA) ([see OECD list here](#)), that is based in an ODA-recipient country, and is conducting research in or on an ODA-recipient country.

'Global South researcher' refers to an individual who is a national of an ODA-recipient country, 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.

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2.6 Does the PI need to have some sort of academic affiliation or hold a PhD or is this just preferred? Also, does the review process prioritise the PI profile, or will the team's collective strengths be taken into consideration for evaluation?

Principal investigators will usually hold a PhD, but other equivalent academic or professional qualifications will also be considered.

2.7 The profile of the PI is important, but the team's collective strength is also evaluated.

How likely is a PhD student acting as single PI to be awarded a grant?

Even for funding at the lower level, principal investigators will usually hold a PhD, although other equivalent academic or professional qualifications will also be considered.

2.8 Can a researcher in west Africa apply for the research even though he is not a national of the country of focus?

Yes, they can apply. Researchers do not need to be from the core XCEPT geographies to apply.

3 Application process

3.1 How do I apply for this funding opportunity?

The application process involves two stages: Concept Note and full Project Proposal. This call for Concept Notes is the first stage.

To apply, applicants should prepare and submit the following:

- **Concept Note Application Form** (max. 1200 words). This includes space to discuss the research idea and evidence gap; methodology; expected outputs; and proposed research team. It also includes space for you to describe a high-level **summary budget**. The form should be submitted as a Microsoft Word document in English. Please note that application forms differ depending on whether you are applying as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.
- **CVs** must be provided for the Principal Investigator and any Co-Investigators (maximum three CVs in total).

The completed Concept Note Application Form and CV(s) should be submitted via email to XCEPT-Fund@chemonics.com by the submission deadline. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered. **Applications must indicate in the subject line of the email the following: “C2-G053 Multiple centres + [Name of lead (whether individual or organisation)]”.**

Detailed instructions on how to submit an application are included in the Call for Concept Notes document.

3.2 How do I apply as an individual? How do I apply as an organisation?

Application forms differ depending on whether you are applying as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. Please fill out the appropriate form:

- [Application form for individuals](#)
- [Application form for organisations](#)

Alongside the application form you will also need to provide CVs for the Principal Investigator and any Co-Investigators (maximum three CVs in total).

3.3 Is there a deadline for Concept Note submission?

Yes, the deadline is **Thursday 25 September 2025 at 10:00 BST**.

3.4 In what language can proposals be submitted?

All applications and supporting documentation must be in English.

3.5 Can I submit more than one Concept Note?

Applicants may submit several Concept Notes, but no organisation or individual will be awarded more than one award as the lead applicant.

3.6 Can I submit to more than one XCEPT funding call?

Yes, the same applicant can submit proposals to different XCEPT funding calls.

3.7 Can a rejected Concept Note be resubmitted?

No, proposals cannot be resubmitted after the applicant has been notified that they were unsuccessful in their application.

3.8 When will I be notified about whether I've been selected to move to the full Project Proposal stage?

Applicants will be notified by XCEPT regarding selection within one month of the Concept Note submission deadline.

3.9 For those invited to submit a full Project Proposal, what will be required?

Those shortlisted applicants who are asked to submit a full Project Proposal at the second stage will be asked to complete a full technical application, providing past performance examples, completing due diligence forms, and submitting a detailed budget and workplan. Further details on requirements and evaluation will be shared with those who are shortlisted.

Shortlisted applicants will have 3 weeks to complete their Project Proposal.

3.10 Who decides who will be shortlisted to submit full Project Proposals?

Concept Notes will go through an eligibility screening followed by a review and assessment, according to the Evaluation Criteria detailed in Section 7 of the call document ('How will your Concept Note be assessed?').

This step is led by members of the Selection Committee and the XCEPT team.

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.

3.11 How many projects will be funded?

We anticipate issuing **between three and five awards** under this call, across a range of funding levels. The final number of awards may be higher or lower, depending on the scale, 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 of research, including thematic coverage, geographic focus, and methodological approaches.

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3.12 Can an expert/researcher be present in two different concept notes?

Yes, this is fine. No lead organisation or researcher will be awarded more than one award as the lead applicant. However, the same organisation or researcher may be involved in more than one successful bid, provided they are only the lead on one.

3.13 Can one organization put in more than 1 application (so, e.g., for different regions)?

Applicants may submit several Concept Notes, but no organisation or individual will be awarded more than one award as the lead applicant.

3.14 Is it possible to submit a proposal at the lower end of the scale and be part of a consortium for a higher-level bid?

Yes, this is possible. Applicants may submit several Concept Notes, at different funding levels, but no organisation or individual will be awarded more than one award as the lead applicant.

3.15 Does the restriction on receiving multiple awards apply across all 4 of the grant opportunities? i.e., can one organisation only be the recipient of one grant award from any of the 4 grants?

No, the rule that no organisation or individual will be awarded more than one award as the lead applicant only applies to each funding call. It does not apply across different funding calls. For example, the same lead organisation could win an award for both the Policy Response call and the Multiple Centres call. But the same lead organisation cannot win two awards under the Policy Response call.

4 Technical requirements

4.1 What are we looking for from this research?

This Call for Concept Notes seeks research that explores the following primary question and related sub-questions:

How does the emergence of multiple centres in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region reshape conflict dynamics?

Sub-themes and questions include:

- **Emergence and evolution:** What drives the emergence of these centres? What dynamics drive their growth and under what conditions do they decline or disappear?
- **Economic drivers:** How do shifting commodity chains, digital finance systems, diaspora revenue flows and other economic forces contribute to the rise or fall of these centres?
- **Maritime and security dimensions:** What roles do maritime trade, port-centric investment, and regional security deployments (especially in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden) play in shaping these dynamics?
- **Political and social implications:** How do these centres affect political settlements, centre-periphery relations, and incentives for violence? What are the implications for state formation and governance?

Proposals need not address all the above sub-questions. Applicants are encouraged to focus on aspects most relevant to their expertise or interest. However, **all submissions should engage with the core theme related to the emergence of hubs / centres and their implications for conflict dynamics in the region.** Additionally, **all submissions also should indicate how research will surface actionable considerations for policy and programme responses.** The latter may include how an understanding of multiple and competing centres might support more inclusive future political settlements and more sustainable conflict mitigation efforts.

For more details see Section 3 ('Description of the research to be commissioned') in the Call for Concept Notes document.

4.2 Is there a preferred geographic focus for proposals?

While the research is expected to focus on the Horn of Africa, XCEPT welcomes proposals that offer comparative analysis to identify and test hypotheses about the evolution and implications of the rise or fall of centres, particularly in XCEPT's core geographies, 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

4.3 What are the preferred outputs?

The primary research output of each award will be a high-quality paper or series of papers, subject to external peer review and suitable for publication by the Awardee organisation or prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed academic journal.

Research papers are typically accompanied by policy-focused outputs, such as summary briefing notes and presentations to policy audiences. Projects may also include outputs geared for a wider public audience, such as commentaries, blogs, podcasts or videos. Applicants should list the outputs they plan to produce in the Application Form.

4.4 How will XCEPT support with outreach and dissemination?

XCEPT will offer technical review and feedback throughout the process. In coordination with XCEPT, awardees are expected to leverage their professional networks to generate opportunities for uptake and impact. 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.¹

4.5 Do we need to have Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in place ahead of submission?

No, you do not need it in place ahead of submission. However, applicants must indicate in the 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 any required approvals and provide relevant proof to XCEPT before any funds can be dispersed.

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4.6 What kind of satellite data (VHR?) and earth observation technical support do you provide?

XCEPT supports researchers to integrate remote research methods (such as satellite data) with field data collection and other data sources. Applicants may consider applying such methods and should outline a proposed approach, but do not need to include this in a budget, as it is funded separately. That said, if you plan to integrate remote research methods into your project, then it is best to have someone on your team who is familiar with these methods.

¹ See FCDO's (formerly DFID's) [Open and Enhanced Access Policy](#).

4.7 Regarding data collection, are you going to provide us with connections with people on the ground to conduct interviews, or is this our responsibility to reach out to them?

It is the responsibility of the applicant to have the capability to fulfil the research outlined in the proposal.

4.8 With regards to the geographic scope, you listed Coastal West Africa and the Sahel - what are the key countries of focus across coastal West Africa?

There are no specific countries of focus in Coastal West Africa. XCEPT has previously done research on Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, and Cameroon, among others.

4.9 What academic journals are you looking to publish in? And is it mandatory or are you more interested on having research with action points?

Applicants should state the journals they intend to target for publication in their Application Form.

It is not mandatory to produce a paper for academic journal publication; the awardee could also publish a think-tank style research report as their primary output. As the call states, the primary research output should be a high-quality paper or series of papers, subject to external peer review and suitable for publication by the Awardee organisation or prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed academic journal.

The project also should include policy-focused outputs, such as summary briefing notes and presentations to policy audiences, as well as outputs geared for a wider public audience, such as commentaries, blogs, podcasts or videos. Applicants should list the outputs they plan to produce in the Application Form.

4.10 What is the sweet spot in terms of number of outputs?

The number and type of outputs should match the funding level that you apply for. For example, we would not expect projects at the lower level of funding to produce as many outputs as a project pitched at a higher level of funding.

4.11 Timeline-wise: will the peer-review process be part of the 12-month contract period?

For papers submitted to an academic journal, the peer review process will not form part of the 12-month contract. The final deliverable will be considered complete once the paper is submitted to the journal. For think tank-style reports, we expect these to go through external peer review and be published within the 12-month contract period.

4.12 I am a bit confused about Hubs/Centres. What exactly is meant?

In this call, “hubs” or “centres” refers to the different places or groups that hold power or influence in and around the Horn of Africa. These could be national governments and capitals, regional authorities or armed movements, important trading towns, ports or cross-border markets, or even social and political actors such as tribal councils, religious movements, or diaspora networks.

The key point is that power in the region is not concentrated in one place but spread across many different centres that sometimes compete and sometimes cooperate. The call is interested in how these centres interact and what this means for conflict, governance, and political settlements. It suggests that studies of conflict should be more dynamic and move beyond a state-centric understanding of how to create longer term stability.

5 Budget

5.1 How much funding is available?

We anticipate issuing **three to five awards** under this call, across a range of funding levels. The final number of awards may be higher or lower, depending on the scale, 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 of research, including thematic coverage, geographic focus, and methodological approaches.

Applicants are encouraged to consider the appropriate scale for their project, bearing in mind the following indicative funding brackets:

- **Up to £15,000** – For desk-based research papers (sole or co-authored) drawing primarily on existing literature, data, and analysis. These projects are not expected to involve field data collection but may include remote interviews.
- **£15,000–£40,000** – For projects that include field data collection. At the lower end of the scale this may involve key informant interviews requiring travel; at the higher end it may involve interviews, surveys or field-based case studies in one or two locations.
- **£40,000–£80,000** – For projects involving more substantial field data collection, potentially across multiple sites or countries, and delivering more extensive outputs.
- **£80,000–£120,000** – For projects proposing a portfolio of research activities across multiple sites, potentially involving mixed methods and multiple outputs that offer comparative case studies in different geographies.

Concept notes should explain the justification for higher budgets relative to the contribution to XCEPT objectives, scholarship, and policy.

5.2 What level of detail is required in the budget submission?

Applicants are expected to submit a budget that provides a high-level breakdown of estimated costs across major categories (e.g. personnel, activities, equipment, etc.)

sufficient to demonstrate feasibility and value for money. This should include costs related to fieldwork, editing and publication, dissemination, etc. It should also include justification for the costs.

There is space for submitting this summary budget in the Concept Note Application Form. A detailed budget is not required at this stage.

Please note that application forms (and accompanying budget tables) differ depending on whether you are applying as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

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5.3 Could you expand on what you consider to be 'reasonable overheads'?

Overheads they should be proportionate to the overall budget and demonstrate value for money. Applicants should briefly describe what their overheads include in the budget breakdown to support assessment of their appropriateness.

5.4 As comms support is provided by Xcept does that mean we shouldn't include those costs around dissemination in our proposal (if we work in organisations that have comms teams for example)

Applicants should include comms costs in their proposed budgets, as relevant. XCEPT communications support is primarily designed to enhance and amplify the activities already planned by research teams. For applicants without dedicated communications capacity – such as smaller organisations or individual researchers applying for modest awards - XCEPT comms support may be provided on a case-by-case basis, depending on need.

5.5 If we have our own in-house remote sensing experts, can we include them within the core analytical team, but with related costs e.g. for satellite imagery excluded from the budget?

Yes. If you plan to integrate remote research methods into your project, then it is best to have someone on your team who is familiar with these methods. XCEPT can cover costs for imagery.

5.6 Is there a requirement for any M&E, and if so should this be represented in the budget?

Successful applicants will be expected to report progress regularly – for example, through quarterly updates. While formal M&E frameworks are not mandated, we are particularly interested in capturing evidence of research impact. Applicants may include budget provisions to support activities that enable this.

5.7 Regarding Labour costs, can a budget be made for a Research Assistant?

Yes, this is fine.

6 Contract

6.1 With whom are contracts signed?

Successful applicants will be contracted directly by Chemonics UK, which manages the XRF. The type of contract issued will depend on the nature of the applicant – whether an individual or an organisation – and, in the case of organisations, their legal status (e.g. for-profit or not-for-profit).

- For organisational applications submitted by a **consortium**, a lead organisation must be designated. This lead organisation will serve as the formal contract holder with Chemonics UK.
- For individual applications with **co-investigators**, XCEPT prefers that co-investigators be engaged as subcontractors under the lead's contract.

If the arrangement described above raise significant complications, then we can consider alternative mechanisms.

6.2 What is the average contract length?

XCEPT anticipates these awards will run for a maximum of 12 months.

6.3 When are the projects likely to start?

XCEPT anticipates these awards to start in December 2025.

6.4 What are the reporting requirements?

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

6.5 Who owns the Intellectual Property Rights?

Any project-specific Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) created under these awards shall be owned by the awardee. In order to ensure the proper dissemination and uptake of the research, the awardee shall, as part of their contract with Chemonics, grant to Chemonics and FCDO a perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive, assignable, royalty-free licence to use these project-specific IPRs.

7 Contact information and Q&A

7.1 How can I find out more about this funding opportunity?

To learn more about this funding opportunity, please join the virtual question and answer (Q&A) session on **Monday 8 September 2025 at 13:00-14:00**. 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/9022867c-c26d-4304-8bc6-0b67e0cc99fa@7c1f24a6-7d39-452c-8237-0726e3b19a73>

7.2 How can I contact the XCEPT team to ask questions?

You can contact the XCEPT Research Fund team via email at xcept-fund@chemonics.com

If you have any clarification questions, please ask them at the Q&A or email them to the email above by the clarification questions deadline on **Thursday 8 September 2025, 18:00 BST**.