



BraveTech EU DefTech Forges

Rules of Contest

Selection of the DefTech Forges winners

EC-DEFIS/2025/OP/0040-1

1. Background

DefTech Forges are advanced multi-day defence technology development events that take place multiple times a year to solve the current military technological challenges by offering innovative technology solutions. The main idea of a DefTech Forge is to bring together individuals and teams from different backgrounds to collaboratively build solutions to predefined thematic challenges by combining existing and new technologies and ideas. The DefTech Forges are supported by the BraveTech EU initiative. The DefTech Forges shall focus on solutions with TRL 4+, addressing the most urgent defence challenges defined by the EU Member States, Norway and Ukraine.

These Rules of Contest define the framework governing the selection of winning teams at **DefTech Forge Estonia (3-7.06.2026)**. They cover the full design and execution of the winner selection process, including the establishment and operation of the Evaluation Committee, application of evaluation criteria and tools, decision-making procedures, documentation requirements, and prize follow-up.

2. Objectives

With the DefTech Forges the Commission is aimed to select the most promising defence solutions in response to the real operational needs, in particular responding to the challenges from the battlefield in Ukraine. The winner selection process ensures transparency, consistency, Commission involvement, fair comparison across teams and locations, complete documentation, coordinated prize administration, and structured handover to mentoring, matchmaking, and Phase 2 activities.

3. Available Budget

The available prize budget is:

- Participant 1: 120.000 EUR
- Participant 2: 120.000 EUR
- Participant 3: 120.000 EUR

The total available budget is 360.000 EUR. The prizes are awarded in the amount of **EUR 120,000 per participant ('winning team')**.

Prize awards are subject to the final award decision of the European Commission.

4. Timetable and deadlines

- a) DefTech Forge is a five-day event during which innovators can present, test and improve their solutions that would compete for monetary prizes.
- b) The **deadline for submission of proposals** falls on the last day of the DefTech Forge on-site event, **07 June 2026**. By this deadline, the participating teams present their solutions to the Evaluation Committee through a structured pitch session, including a presentation, questions and answers, and, where applicable, demonstration of a prototype or technical solution.

5. Eligibility

Participants must meet the following mandatory requirements.

- **Establishment:** Must be established with their executive management structure located within the EU, Norway, or Ukraine
- **Ownership and Control:** Participants should not be subject to control by a country or entity established outside of the EU, Norway, or Ukraine¹
- **Derogation and Guarantees:** By derogation, companies established in the EU or Norway that are controlled by non-associated third-country entities may still be eligible if they provide guarantees approved under Article g(4) of the EDF Regulation.

The following section outlines the participation rights and eligibility requirements for the DefTech Forges Edition #1:

- **Inclusivity:** Participation is open to individuals, start-ups, or scale-ups established in any EU Member State, Norway, or Ukraine.
- **Non-Discrimination:** The Action welcomes all participants of legal adult age and maintains a policy of non-discrimination based on race, religion, gender expression, age, disability, or marital status.
- **Expenditure:** Participation in the Action is free of charge. However, participants are responsible for covering their own costs, including but not limited to travel, accommodation, meals, insurance, and any other expenses incurred in connection with attendance at events, bootcamps, or mentoring sessions, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

6. Exclusion

Applicants which are subject to an **EU exclusion decision** or in one of the following **exclusion situations** that bar them from receiving EU funding can NOT participate²:

- bankruptcy, winding up, affairs administered by the courts, arrangement with creditors, suspended business activities or other similar procedures (including procedures for persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- in breach of social security or tax obligations (including if done by persons with unlimited liability for the applicant's debts)
- guilty of grave professional misconduct³ (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the prize)

¹ 'Control' is to be understood as the possibility to exercise decisive influence on your company (notably in relation to its strategic business decisions), directly or indirectly, through one or more intermediate entities, 'de jure' or 'de facto' (guidance-participation-in-dep-he-edf-cef-dig-restricted-calls_dep-he-edf-cef-dig_en.pdf). A company established in the EU and Norway, and controlled by non-associated third-country entity, is eligible to participate if it has already received a guarantee¹ approved by the country in which it is established (to participate in the European Defence Fund).

² See Articles 138 and 143 EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

³ 'Professional misconduct' includes, in particular, the following: violation of ethical standards of the profession; wrongful conduct with impact on professional credibility; breach of generally accepted professional ethical standards; false declarations/misrepresentation of information; participation in a cartel or other agreement distorting competition; violation of IPR; attempting to influence decision-making processes by taking advantage, through misrepresentation, of a conflict of interests, or to obtain confidential information from public authorities to gain an advantage; incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence or similar activities contrary to the EU values where negatively affecting or risking to affect the performance of a legal commitment.

- committed fraud, corruption, links to a criminal organisation, money laundering, terrorism-related crimes (including terrorism financing), child labour or human trafficking (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the prize)
- shown significant deficiencies in complying with main obligations under an EU procurement contract, grant agreement, prize, expert contract, or similar (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the prize)
- guilty of irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No [2988/95](#) (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the prize)
- created under a different jurisdiction with the intent to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations in the country of origin or created another entity with this purpose (including if done by persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control, beneficial owners or persons who are essential for the award/implementation of the prize)
- intentionally and without proper justification resisted⁴ an investigation, check or audit carried out by an EU authorising officer (or their representative or auditor), OLAF, the EPPO, or the European Court of Auditors.

In addition, applicants will also be refused if it turns out that⁵:

- during the award procedure, they misrepresented information required as a condition for participating or failed to supply that information
- they were previously involved in the preparation of the call and this entails a distortion of competition that cannot be remedied otherwise (conflict of interest).

7. Evaluation and Award Procedure

- a) Participation in the evaluation is subject to compliance with the following mandatory requirements, which apply to all selected Participants and, where specified, to winning teams.
 - Attendance at onboarding sessions.
 - Full participation in the in-person Forge event.
 - Mandatory participation in mentoring and bootcamps for winning teams.
 - Timely submission of required deliverables.
- b) Evaluations are conducted exclusively using the Commission-approved criteria and equal weighting.
- c) An Evaluation Committee is established, comprising a minimum of five members representing the European Commission, defence industry, local armed forces, innovation agencies, Ukrainian authorities, and the European Defence Agency where applicable. The Evaluation Committee is appointed by the European Commission.

⁴ 'Resisting an investigation, check or audit' means carrying out actions with the goal or effect of preventing, hindering or delaying the conduct of any of the activities needed to perform the investigation, check or audit, such as refusing to grant the necessary access to its premises or any other areas used for business purposes, concealing or refusing to disclose information or providing false information.

⁵ See Article 143(1) EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

- d) A Chair and Secretary is appointed to manage the proceedings and documentation integrity.
- e) Evaluation Committee members are required to sign confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declarations.
- f) On the final day of each DefTech Forge, and upon arrival at the venue, all Evaluation Committee members complete the mandatory compliance formalities prior to the start of the evaluation process.
- g) Each Evaluation Committee member signs a one-page declaration confirming that they:
 - Will act impartially and independently in all evaluations;
 - Will treat all applicant information as confidential and comply with applicable data-handling rules; and
 - Will disclose any relationship, past or present, that could reasonably be perceived as affecting impartiality in relation to a specific participating team.
- h) Given the nature of defence innovation ecosystems, prior professional contact or ongoing ecosystem interaction does not automatically constitute a conflict of interest. Where such links exist, they are managed transparently through formal declaration and, where required, team-specific recusal.
- i) If an Evaluation Committee member declares a link to a particular team that could reasonably be perceived as biasing judgement – such as a direct financial interest, formal advisory or mentoring role, employment relationship, or close personal relationship – the member is recused for that team only. In such cases, the member:
 - Does not score the team;
 - Does not ask questions during that team’s pitch slot; and
 - Does not participate in any consensus discussion directly related to that team’s ranking.
- j) All recusals are formally recorded in the consensus minutes. Exclusion of a appointed member from the Evaluation Committee occurs only if a conflict is broad in scope and cannot be effectively managed through team-level recusal (for example, where multiple material conflicts would undermine meaningful participation). All signed declarations and any recusal records are retained in the decision documentation file for audit purposes.
- k) Each Member of the Evaluation Committee will receive an evaluation pack, which contain a standard set of documents and tools used by Evaluation Committee members on pitch day. It is issued in a uniform format to ensure comparability, equal treatment, and procedural consistency.
- l) The evaluation pack includes:
 - the **Commission-approved selection criteria and weights** (or a DG DEFIS–approved equivalent);
 - a clear **evaluation logic** translating each criterion into observable and assessable elements;
 - **individual scoring sheets** requiring short written justification for each criterion; and
 - **practical guidance** for the Chair and the Secretary on scoring, documentation, and procedural handling.

- m) Before the first pitch, the Chair formally opens the session by confirming the evaluation framework, including the scoring scale, requirement for written justifications, rules governing questioning, session timing, and the applicable tie-break procedure. Confidentiality obligations are reiterated to all Evaluation Committee members.
- n) Each Evaluation Committee member then evaluates and scores teams individually and independently, using the standardised scoring sheet (digital where possible). The Secretary provides operational support throughout the process, including facilitating access to evaluation tools, supporting timekeeping, collecting submitted score sheets, and verifying completeness. The Secretary does not influence scoring decisions.
- o) Once individual scoring is completed, the evaluation system automatically generates a preliminary ranked list and locks entries to ensure full traceability, including time stamps, individual evaluator inputs, and version control.
- p) The Chair then convenes a closed consensus meeting with all Evaluation Committee members to validate the results, discuss and resolve any material scoring discrepancies, and confirm the final ranking. Discussions are strictly limited to evidence presented during the DefTech Forge and to the approved evaluation criteria; non-evidenced or external considerations are excluded.
- q) Winner selection will be implemented through a single, standard evaluation toolkit. The toolkit fixes the criteria and weights, the scoring method, the documentation produced, and the evidence retained for reporting and audit. To present the evaluation approach in a clear, audit-ready way, the toolkit is structured into three standardised “blocks”, each with a defined purpose and a concrete evidence output.
- r) Following consensus, the Chair confirms the three winning participants (‘winning teams’) as provisional winners. Should the provisional winners not be eligible to be awarded the prize, replacement shall be used from the reserve list of the same location until exhaustion of the reserve list or having 3 fully eligible winners.
- s) The Secretary documents the outcome in the consensus minutes, recording the final agreed scores, ranking, and a concise, consolidated rationale for each of the three winning teams. The Secretary then compiles the complete decision file, including scoring exports, signed minutes, and any required annexes.
- t) If two or more teams are tied at or near the winner threshold, the Chair applies the predefined tie-break rule set out in the evaluation pack and ensures that the rationale for the final decision is clearly documented.
- u) Following completion, the local organiser submits the signed consensus minutes and consolidated scoring outputs to the Consortium. The Consortium consolidates results across locations, prepares ToR-compliant reporting, and coordinates prize administration follow-up. The proposed winner selection is then submitted to the Contracting Authority for final validation and the Commission’s award decision.

8. Award Criteria

- a) The European Commission is responsible for approving the implementation and is the sole responsible for the award decision of winners.
- b) The participants solutions would be evaluated and ranked against the following **award criteria**

- Criterion 1: relevance to the DefTech Forge themes and challenges;
 - Criterion 2: innovativeness and value for defence end-users; and
 - Criterion 3: quality of the team.
- c) For each criterion, the Consortium provides a concise description of what different score levels represent, including “what a strong, adequate, or weak score looks like” and prompts guiding Evaluation Committee members on acceptable evidence. Examples include elements demonstrated in the pitch, Q&A, prototype, or demo, as well as distinctions between substantiated evidence and unsupported assumptions.
- d) This structured approach reduces subjective or “gut-feel” scoring and ensures that evaluation decisions are evidence-based, transparent, and defensible.
- e) The scoring logic translates the ToR winner-selection criteria into observable signals with consistent score anchors on a **1–5 scale**. Each score must be supported by a short, written justification per criterion.
- f) The scoring framework may be further refined for specific DefTech Forge editions to reflect edition-specific challenges and operational needs, while maintaining the same underlying criteria, weights, and scoring structure.
- g) Evaluation Committee member records (a) a numeric score per criterion, (b) a short justification per criterion, and (c) any conditions/risks noted (e.g., security constraints, integration dependencies, missing test evidence). The scoring sheet is structured so that it can be used either on paper or digitally, but the fields remain identical. The secretary verifies completeness (no missing scores/justifications) before consolidation.
- h) All applications will be informed about the evaluation result (evaluation result letter). Successful applications will be awarded the prize; the other ones will be put on the reserve list or rejected. If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a complaint (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter).

Table 1 Evaluation criteria for DefTech Forge winner selection

CRITERIA	EVIDENCE AND QUESTIONS EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS SHOULD USE	SCORING ANCHORS (1–5)	WEIGHT
Relevance of the idea, solution or prototype with regards to the DefTech Forge themes and challenges	Does the solution directly address the stated challenge and constraints? Is the use case credible for the intended defence end-user? Does the team demonstrate understanding of operational context, environment and users? Evidence can include pitch + Q&A + demo/prototype; relevant end-user/mentor feedback gathered during the DefTech Forge (if provided through the official	<p>1 (Weak): Tangential fit; unclear end-user/use case; generic claims; ignores constraints raised during the DefTech Forge.</p> <p>3 (Adequate): Clear link to challenge; plausible scenario; some constraints addressed; partial fit evidenced in pitch/Q&A.</p> <p>5 (Strong): Direct, specific fit; constraints/trade-offs</p>	33%

	process); and evidence of how the solution fits the specific challenge.	understood; relevance evidenced via demo/prototype and/or validated clarifications from end-user/mentor feedback captured during the DefTech Forge.	
Innovativeness of the idea, solution or prototype, and its value created for defence end-users	<p>What is genuinely differentiated (approach, performance, cost, resilience, deployment model)?</p> <p>What value is created for end-users and how could it be measured?</p> <p>Evidence can include demo/prototype performance indicators; comparisons/benchmarks; validation performed during the DefTech Forge; and signals emerging from the team’s iteration/progress during the DefTech Forge (e.g., improved solution design, clearer value proposition, refined test approach).</p>	<p>1 (Weak): Limited differentiation; unclear value; “buzzword” claims; no credible path to show value.</p> <p>3 (Adequate): Some novelty/adaptation; value plausible; partial feasibility evidence; some validation steps identified.</p> <p>5 (Strong): Clear differentiation and defensible value; measurable outcomes/targets; credible validation path (tests/prototype/benchmarks) and, where applicable, evidence of refinement during the DefTech Forge that strengthens end-user value.</p>	33%
Quality of the team (technical and business expertise, understanding of the thematic area, commitment to the project, ability to present the idea, solution, prototype or business model)	<p>Does the team have capabilities to execute and close gaps? Do they respond to challenge questions with evidence? In addition, Evaluation Committee members review a short “next steps” plan presented by the team, indicating what they will deliver in the next 2–6 months, and how the prize would be used to advance the solution (e.g., validation, prototyping, integration readiness, compliance/security).</p> <p>Progress during the DefTech Forge (responsiveness to feedback, quality of iteration, delivery discipline) may be considered as evidence of execution capability.</p>	<p>1 (Weak): Major capability gaps; unclear roles; weak delivery; no credible next steps; poor responsiveness to technical/operational challenges raised.</p> <p>3 (Adequate): Core skills present; gaps recognised; feasible next steps plan; communicates clearly with some limitations.</p> <p>5 (Strong): Balanced team with clear roles; strong execution signals; high responsiveness; clear, credible next steps plan (2–6 months) and coherent use of prize aligned to advancing readiness.</p>	33%

9. Other Conditions

a. Payment arrangements

Following the Commission's award decision, the Consortium shall transfer the prize funds:

- to the **company bank account of the winning team**, where the team has a legal entity; or
- where no legal entity exists, to the **designated team leader**, in accordance with the payment arrangements defined during onboarding.

No payment shall be made until all applicable payment readiness, and compliance requirements have been satisfied.

b. Payment Readiness and Compliance Checks

For each winning team, the Consortium shall prepare a **payment readiness compliance pack** consolidating the minimum checks and documentary evidence required to execute a defensible transfer and maintain a complete audit trail.

This compliance pack shall:

- build on the eligibility, ownership and control checks carried out earlier in the programme; and
- be **refreshed immediately prior to payment** to capture any material changes, including but not limited to changes in shareholders, ownership structure, authorised representatives, or designated payee.

Sanctions screening shall include verification against the **EU Financial Sanctions Database** and other applicable EU restrictive-measures resources. Screening shall cover the intended payee and, where relevant, controlling persons or beneficial owners.

Corporate and legal verification shall be conducted using **official business registers and reputable corporate intelligence sources** (such as Orbis or equivalent). Verification shall focus on the legitimacy of registration, representation rights, and – where required for control assessment – a clear understanding of the ownership and capital structure.

c. Transfer Execution and Evidence Retention

Once the payment readiness compliance pack is complete and validated – including confirmed payee identity, bank account details and authorising documentation – the Consortium shall initiate prize payment through a **standardised payment instruction workflow**.

The Consortium shall retain, as a single, version-controlled **prize payment evidence pack**, at minimum:

- proof of payment (e.g. bank transfer confirmation);
- the approved Evaluation Committee and Commission award decision linking the winner to the payee; and
- completed compliance and screening documentation.

This evidence pack shall be stored in the project repository and placed in the **Commission-shared folder** for review and downstream continuity, including audit purposes and Phase 2 interfacing.

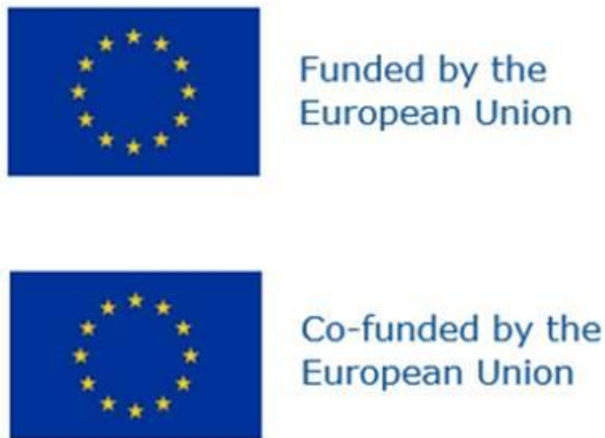
d. Use of Prize Funds

Winning teams shall use the prize funds **to support further development of their solution toward Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 6–7** and to prepare for potential participation in Phase 2.

e. Communication — Dissemination — Visibility of funding

Prize winners must promote the prize and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner.

Communication activities related to the prize (including media interviews, press statements, presentations, etc., in electronic form, via traditional or social media, etc.), must acknowledge EU support and display the European flag (emblem) and funding statement (translated into local languages, where appropriate):



The emblem must remain distinct and separate and cannot be modified by adding other visual marks, brands or text.

Apart from the emblem, no other visual identity or logo may be used to highlight the EU support.

When displayed in association with other logos (e.g. of winners or sponsors), the emblem must be displayed at least as prominently and visibly as the other logos.

For the purposes of these obligations, the winners may use the emblem without first obtaining approval from the granting authority. This does not, however, give them the right to exclusive use. Moreover, they may not appropriate the emblem or any similar trademark or logo, either by registration or by any other means.

Any communication or dissemination activity related to the prize must use factually accurate information.

Moreover, it must indicate the following disclaimer (translated into local languages where appropriate):

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the

author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or [name of the granting authority]. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.”

f. IPR – Rights of use

The granting authority does not obtain ownership of the results produced in the context of the prize.

The granting authority has the right to use non-sensitive information relating to the prize and materials and documents received from the winners (such as pictures or audio-visual material, in paper or electronic form) for information, communication, dissemination and publicity purposes.

Photos and videos taken by the granting authority either in preparation of the award ceremony or during the award ceremony are the sole property of the granting authority.

g. Sole liability of participants

The Commission shall not be held liable for any damage caused or sustained by any of the participants, including any damage caused to third parties as a consequence of or during the implementation of the activities related to the contest.

h. Checks, audits and investigations

The granting authority, the European Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA) may carry out checks, audits and investigations in relation to the prize.⁶

i. Cancellation

The granting authority may cancel the contest or decide not to award the prize — without any obligation to compensate participants (e.g. no applications, jury cannot determine winner, winner is not eligible or must be excluded, objectives have already been achieved, etc). In this case, you will be informed via a call or topic update.

j. Withdrawal of the prize – Recovery of undue amounts

The granting authority may withdraw the prize after its award and recover all payments made, if it finds out that:

- false information, fraud or corruption was used to obtain it
- the prize winners were not eligible or should have been excluded or
- the prize winners are in serious breach of their obligations under these Rules of Contest

⁶ For the powers of OLAF, EPPO and ECA, see Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 883/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 September 2013 concerning investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1073/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (Euratom) No 1074/1999 (OJ L 248, 18/09/2013, p. 1), Council Regulation (Euratom, EC) No 2185/1996 of 11 November 1996 concerning on-the-spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission in order to protect the European Communities’ financial interests against fraud and other irregularities (OJ L 292, 15/11/1996, p. 2), Council Regulation (EU) 2017/1939 of 12 October 2017 implementing enhanced cooperation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (‘the EPPO’) and Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) and Article 263 of EU Financial Regulation [2024/2509](#).

k. Complaints

This procedure establishes the framework for the submission, handling, review, and resolution. If you believe that the evaluation procedure was flawed, you can submit a complaint (following the deadlines and procedures set out in the evaluation result letter). Please note that notifications which have not been opened within 10 days after sending will be considered to have been accessed and that deadlines will be counted from opening/access (see also [Funding & Tenders Portal Terms and Conditions](#)). Please also be aware that for complaints submitted electronically, there may be character limitations.