

PRESS RELEASE

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DRF Luftrettung's Mission Statistics 2025

Rapid assistance from the air continues to grow in importance

- A total of 36,407 helicopter missions and repatriations
- Europe's most modern fleet
- Increase in missions carried out in the dark
- Successful applications for HEMS base tenders

Air rescue is an important component of rapid emergency care in Germany, as shown by DRF Luftrettung's mission statistics from last year. Overall, the non-profit air rescue organisation recorded a slight increase in missions of 1.6 per cent (2024: 35,850 missions). DRF Luftrettung crews were deployed more frequently, especially in the dark. Another clear indication of the outstanding quality of the red and white air rescue service is the number of contracts awarded to DRF Luftrettung in various tendering procedures in 2025. CEO Dr Krystian Pracz renews his call on politicians to consistently push ahead with the reform of emergency care.

Against the backdrop of discussions about hospital and emergency care reform, air rescue plays an important role in the overall emergency rescue system. Air rescuers perform particularly important work when it comes to caring for seriously injured and ill patients, as shown by the figures from the DRF Luftrettung mission statistics 2025: As in previous years, the most frequent reasons for helicopter emergency calls were cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks or strokes – medical emergencies in which rapid assistance by air is vital for survival. The red-and-white air rescue service was also frequently dispatched to emergencies involving serious accidents and falls from height. The rescue hoist was used 226 times in 2025 to provide rapid emergency medical care and airlift patients, even in difficult-to-access terrain: an increase of 41 per cent compared to the previous year. The DRF Assistance team, based at Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden Airport, carried out 479 worldwide patient repatriations with medical accompaniment using its three ambulance aircraft. Here, too, there was a significant increase of 24 percent compared to 2024. The crews flew to a total of 45 countries and covered a distance of around 1.6 million kilometres – equivalent to 40 trips around the world.

Leading in Germany: 24-hour emergency assistance from the air

In 2025, crews were on call around the clock at 13 DRF Luftrettung HEMS bases and with extended off-peak hours at two additional HEMS bases. A total of one quarter of the missions carried out by the crews at these bases took place in the dark. This high percentage clearly shows that there is a need for rapid emergency medical assistance from the air outside daylight hours, especially in autumn and winter, when people are often still active after sunset. Air rescue in the dark should therefore be more widely available. 'This is one of the key demands we are making emphatically to politicians,' emphasises Dr Krystian Pracz, CEO of DRF Luftrettung. 'Comprehensive and nationwide emergency care must not depend on the time of day. Technically, we are already able to conduct operations after sunset from all our bases. We are therefore calling for a needs-based expansion that takes social life into account – meaning both the extension of off-peak hours and 24-hour air rescue. Emergencies know no time of day.'

Optimal patient care at the point of care

In an emergency, it is crucial to quickly assess the patient's condition in order to initiate targeted treatment. The emergency doctors and paramedics at DRF Luftrettung are highly trained and have state-of-the-art equipment for advanced diagnostics at their disposal at the scene of the emergency. The use of small, lightweight, and therefore mobile ultrasound devices allows internal bleeding, injuries, and illnesses to be detected and treated better and faster. Supported by donations, DRF Luftrettung has been using mobile blood gas analyzers across the board since 2023. These devices enable blood analyses to be carried out directly at the scene of the emergency, which previously could only be done through complex laboratory tests in a hospital. This diagnostic tool also helps to identify and treat clinical pictures more quickly and reliably. However, development is not yet complete: in emergency medical research, DRF Luftrettung is participating with selected HEMS bases in the testing of a protein blood test that can be used to diagnose cerebral hemorrhages at the scene of the emergency.

Point-of-care technology plays a crucial role in initiating the right treatment and selecting the most suitable hospital. When all links in the rescue chain work together optimally, the patient's chances of survival and recovery increase, and the length of hospital stays or the extent of rehabilitation measures are reduced. In addition to reducing suffering, optimal diagnosis and treatment at the point of care also helps to lower healthcare costs.

Quality and reliability in air rescue: developments in tenders

Last year, several tender procedures in various regions of Germany underscored the importance of quality, reliability, and experience in air rescue. The decisions made by the authorities highlight the importance of proven structures and the continuous development of airborne emergency care.

At the beginning of the year, following the completion of the tender process, the Christoph Dortmund intensive care transport helicopter operated by DRF Luftrettung officially began 24-hour operations as part of the public emergency rescue system. In Weiden, the extension option was exercised: the responsible authority (Zweckverband Oberpfalz-Nord) thus confirmed the continuation of the existing cooperation with DRF Luftrettung. For Christoph Regensburg, a new contract period will begin in September 2026 following successful participation in the tender process. A new HEMS base in Lahr (Ortenaukreis) is scheduled to go into operation as early as spring this year. This was based on a needs assessment commissioned by the state of Baden-Württemberg and a subsequent tender process, as a result of which DRF Luftrettung was entrusted with the operation of the base. The Mannheim HEMS base will also continue to be operated by DRF Luftrettung beyond November 2026, according to the decision following the conclusion of the tender process for Christoph 53. In addition, preparations were made in 2025 for the takeover of the HEMS base in Berlin-Steglitz (Christoph 31). Since the beginning of 2026, DRF Luftrettung has been operating all three HEMS bases in the German capital.

Call on politicians: push ahead with emergency care reform

The reform of emergency and rescue services must be consistently pursued in the interests of patients – this is one of DRF Luftrettung's key demands on politicians. 'Air rescue already plays a significant role in the care of particularly complex and time-critical cases in rural areas,' Dr Pracz points out. 'The goal must be to use existing resources and expertise efficiently and to the greatest benefit of our patients.'

DRF Luftrettung is committed to connecting all emergency care providers through comprehensive digitalization and establishing emergency rescue services that transcend district and state boundaries. The air rescue service is also pushing for the creation of a legal framework to establish procedures that enable the use of air rescue even in bad weather. 'From an aviation and technical point of view, DRF Luftrettung is already set up for this today,' emphasizes Dr Pracz.

Committed to patient welfare: Europe's most modern fleet

The best patient care requires the best equipment. DRF Luftrettung completed a major project in this area at the end of the year: thanks to the continuous renewal of its helicopter fleet, the non-profit air rescue organization is constantly in operation with state-of-the-art helicopters of the latest generation. With H145 and H135 helicopters, DRF Luftrettung operates the most modern fleet of any air rescue organization in Europe.

The H145 is ideally suited for a wide range of applications in dual-use operations: from emergency missions to complex intensive care transports between hospitals. Its high payload and a third seat in the cabin offer a wide range of possible applications. For example, a pediatric team can accompany the transport of a child, or heavy medical equipment can be loaded for particularly complex medical missions. The crew can also carry more fuel, enabling them to fly longer distances without refueling, which saves valuable time for patients. The helicopter's increased performance also opens up more possibilities for missions at high altitudes, such as in the Alps. In addition, the new rotor system makes it even smoother in the air, which benefits both patients and crew. The H135 and H145 helicopters are equipped with a Helionix cockpit, among other features: a digital cockpit that supports pilots in optimizing flight performance, thereby increasing safety. In conjunction with a four-axis autopilot, an anti-collision system, weather radar, high-performance searchlights, and state-of-the-art medical technology, the aircraft are optimally equipped for complex air rescue missions day and night.

The next step in fleet modernization has already been taken: DRF Luftrettung and Airbus Helicopters signed a purchase agreement for ten H140 helicopters in July 2025. With this step, DRF Luftrettung is continuing its tradition as a launch customer for new innovative helicopter types.

Information under www.drf-luftrettung.de.

About DRF Luftrettung

The DRF Luftrettung, based in Filderstadt, is one of the largest air rescue organisations in Europe. The helicopters and ambulance aircraft of the non-profit organisation take off for their missions from 33 bases at 31 locations in Germany. These include emergency rescue missions, transports of intensive care patients between hospitals, as well as repatriation flights of patients from abroad. At 13 of these bases, crews are on standby around the clock, at one further HEMS base in daytime operation with extended off-peak hours (6 a.m. to 10 p.m.). Helicopters with rescue hoists are used at five bases. In total, the DRF Luftrettung performed 35,850 missions in 2024. The non-profit air rescue organization relies on financial support to continuously expand its life-saving mission. The DRF e.V. already has around 400,000 supporting members at its side. For more information, please visit www.drf-luftrettung.de

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