

Brussels, 11 February 2009

112, the single European emergency number: Frequently Asked Questions

What is 112?

112 is the single European emergency number to dial free of charge in case of an emergency across the European Union (EU). Any citizen in the EU should be able to reach emergency services when dialling 112, from their fixed, their mobile phones and from public payphones.

Why is the Commission advocating 112?

As European citizens increasingly travel to other EU countries, for business, study or pleasure, there was a need for a single number across the EU that they would be able to easily remember even under the stress of an emergency situation. Instead of having to remember different numbers in different countries, citizens now need only one, wherever they go in the EU. In advocating 112, the European Commission wished to complement the freedom to travel that the Single European market already offers to its EU citizens.

How does 112 work?

People calling 112 – whether from a fixed line or a mobile phone – are connected to an operator. Depending on the national organisation of emergency services, the operator will either deal with the request directly or transfer it to one of the emergency services (such as ambulance, fire brigade or police).

In which situations can people use 112?

People can call 112 in an emergency requiring in particular an ambulance, fire brigade or the police. 112 should not be used for non-emergencies; such as to ask for information on telephone numbers or addresses, road conditions or weather reports.

Does 112 replace national emergency numbers?

No. The intention is that 112 should operate alongside existing national emergency numbers. This is the case in most Member States.

Six countries (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and most recently Romania) have established 112 as their main national emergency number and have been promoting it as the single number for all emergency services.

When was 112 created?

In 1991, a Council Decision decided to introduce 112 as the European single emergency number. Since 2003, EU telecoms rules have set out specific obligations for Member States, which the Commission is monitoring and enforcing with infringement proceedings where necessary. In particular, Member States should ensure that fixed and mobile phone users can call 112 to reach emergency services free of charge and that caller location information is made available to emergency services so that they can find accident victims quickly.

What is the European Commission's role in making 112 available?

The European Commission follows the implementation of 112 in Member States in particular through the "**Communication Committee**", a body that unites the representatives of Member State authorities responsible for telecommunications. The Commission has also set up an "**Expert Group on Emergency Access**" of national officials representing emergency response centres, civil protection and telecoms authorities. This group seeks practical solutions to problems experienced by the emergency services at local, regional or national levels and deals with issues related to the application of new technologies for communication with emergency services.

The European Commission also takes legal actions against countries that fail to comply with EU rules. To ensure the effective implementation of 112, the Commission has so far launched **17 infringement proceedings** against 15 countries due to lack of availability of 112, of caller location or of appropriate handling of 112 calls. 13 of these have been closed following corrective measures.

The European Commission is also financing research projects, such as eCall for automatic 112 calls in case of road accidents or Total Conversation for a combined transmission of voice, video and real time text, and it is also currently tackling this issue in its proposed reform of the [EU's telecommunications rules](#).

Moreover, the European Commission launched a new [112 website](#) in June 2008 to inform citizens about how 112 works in all EU Member States in time for the summer holidays. The website has now been updated with the latest information about the best practices and the shortcomings in implementing 112 and with an interactive section dedicated to children.

On 11 February 2009, the European Commission, together with the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union established 11 of February as the "European 112 Day" to further increase awareness of 112.

And the role of the Member States?

Member States are responsible for the organisation of the emergency services and their response to 112 calls. The EU legislation requires Member States to ensure that any citizen in the EU should be able to reach emergency services free of charge when dialling 112, either from their fixed telephone line or from their mobile phones

In addition, 112 calls must be appropriately answered and handled. In practice, this means that the quality of response to emergency calls should be the same, irrespective of whether 112 or a national emergency number is used.

Member States must also ensure that emergency services are able to establish the location of the person calling 112. The ability to locate the caller in case of an emergency may be of great significance if the person is unable to state his or her location, which can happen particularly when calling from mobile phones or while travelling abroad.

Finally, EU countries must inform citizens (nationals and visitors) of the existence of 112 as the European emergency numbers and under which circumstances they should use it.

Are there organisations promoting 112?

The European Emergency Number Association ([EENA](#)) has also worked actively to promote 112 over the past years. On 10 February 2009, EENA is organising a 112 Awards ceremony in Brussels to recognise best practices in different areas including: education, policy initiatives, emergency centres and awareness.

EENA has also selected the lyrics for a 112 anthem following a competition held on the internet. On 11 of February 2009, the singer Nara Noian will perform this anthem with a children's choir at the European Parliament's premises.

How is 112 working across the EU? What still needs to be improved?

- 112 is now available from both fixed and mobile telephones in all 27 Member States.
- Caller location information is not fully implemented in **3 countries** (Italy, Lithuania and the Netherlands), which are currently subject to EU infringement proceedings.
- **Italy** is also subject to infringement proceedings over the lack of appropriate handling and answering of 112 calls.
- Even though 112 has been operational for a number of years, its existence needs to be better promoted to citizens. A Eurobarometer survey published by the European Commission on 11 February 2009 showed that only 24% of Europeans are aware that they can call this number for all emergency services across the EU. Even in countries where people generally know 112 as a *national* emergency number, few are aware that it is the number that can also be used in other EU countries. The Commission is therefore encouraging Member States to step up their awareness raising efforts.
- 29% of 112 callers have encountered language problems when calling while abroad, which shows that the foreign language capabilities of 112 emergency call centres should be improved.

What is "caller location"?

To help emergency services find victims of emergencies, who may not be able to speak or do not know where they are exactly, the EU law requires Member States to ensure that telephone operators, both fixed and mobile, make available to emergency services information about the location of the caller to 112. Availability of caller location information can greatly increase the speed and efficiency of emergency services' response to an accident. In the case of a fixed 112 call, the emergency services should normally receive the address where the telephone concerned is registered. As far as mobile 112 calls are concerned, the normally available caller location just points to the mobile network cell (antenna), from which the 112 call originates. Accordingly, the accuracy of this information depends on the coverage area of the network cell, which is generally smaller in densely populated urban areas than in rural areas.

In 2003 the Commission recommended that caller location information should be '**pushed**' to emergency services automatically with every 112 call rather than '**pulled**' – specifically requested by emergency services – for individual calls ([IP/03/1122](#)). Caller location information for 112 calls is currently pushed in 6 Member States for fixed calls (Bulgaria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Sweden), and in 7 for mobile calls (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Luxembourg, Portugal and Romania). In countries where caller location information is only provided when 'pulled' by emergency services, Member States reported on the time needed to provide caller location when requested, which varied from near instantaneous to delays ranging from several minutes to four hours in some countries.

Caller location of 112 mobile calls is not yet available in several countries. Italy, Lithuania and the Netherlands are currently subject to EU infringement proceedings on this matter ([IP/07/1785](#), [IP/08/519](#), [IP/08/358](#)).

Can 112 emergency centres handle calls in EU languages that are not the national or official language in the country you visit?

Among the 23 Member States which provided information on the language issue, 19 Member States (in addition to the UK and Ireland) reported on their ability to handle calls in English (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden). 112 calls in French are answered in 9 Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Finland) in addition to France, Luxembourg and Belgium. 112 calls in German are also answered in 9 countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia and Finland).

What happens when mobile users have no home network coverage?

There may be situations where a mobile user is not able to use the mobile network to which he or she has subscribed, because of lack of coverage or technical problems, but it could still be possible to call emergency services by using another available mobile network. 23 Member States have reported that mobile subscribers can call 112 in such a situation Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden.

Also, "pay as you go" customers can usually still call 112 even when they have no credit left in their phone account.

What is done to facilitate access to 112 by disabled people?

Not everyone can easily call 112 in an emergency. In particular, people with hearing or speech impairments or people with serious injuries may find it difficult to call and explain what has happened. To facilitate access by disabled users, a number of EU Member States have already introduced facilities such as possibility to send fax or SMS or use video or text relay telephones for contacting emergency services through 112. However, such facilities are not yet available everywhere. According to this February's Eurobarometer survey ([IP/08/198](#)), 9 out of 10 EU citizens agree that access to emergency services for disabled users should be improved.

The European Commission wants to make 112 more easily accessible by people with disabilities. The Commission has therefore tackled this issue in the reform of the EU's Telecoms rules that it proposed last November ([IP/07/1677](#)).

The European Commission has today updated its dedicated website on 112.

For more information, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/112>