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Telecoms: 112 - Europe's single emergency number - frequently asked questions

(see also [IP/10/151](#))

What is 112?

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

How does 112 work?

People calling 112 – whether from a fixed line or a mobile phone – are connected to an operator. Depending on how emergency services are organised in the country in question, 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). Each Member State is responsible for the organisation of its own emergency services, including the response to 112 and to national emergency calls.

In many cases, operators are able to answer in English or other widely used European languages. Country specific information about languages is available on the [112 website](#). However, according to a recent Eurobarometer survey, 12% of people calling 112 while abroad still encounter language problems.

In which situations can people use 112?

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

Does 112 replace national emergency numbers?

In most Member States, no. 112 operates alongside existing national emergency numbers.

Seven countries (Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Malta and Romania) have decided to establish 112 as their main emergency number and have been promoting it as the single number for all emergency services.

When was 112 introduced?

In 1991, following a Decision of the EU's Council of Ministers to introduce 112 as the European single emergency number. Since 2003, EU telecoms rules have set out specific obligations for EU countries, which the European Commission is monitoring and enforcing with infringement proceedings where necessary.

What are the EU rules for 112?

Since 2003, EU legislation requires EU countries to ensure that any citizen in the EU can reach emergency services free of charge when dialling 112, either from their fixed telephone line, payphones 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.

EU countries must also ensure that information about the location of the person calling 112 is made available to emergency services so that they can find accident victims quickly. 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 in particular 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 number and under which circumstances they should use it.

The July 2009 Roaming Regulation established that citizens should receive information about 112 by SMS, when they travel across the EU.

New EU telecoms rules adopted in December 2009 strengthened the 112 provisions further, in particular by requiring Member States to ensure quicker provision of caller location information, , to raise awareness of 112 amongst travellers and to improve access to 112 for people with disabilities and by extending 112 access obligations for certain Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers. These new EU telecoms rules must be implemented in all EU countries by June 2011.

Why is the European Commission advocating 112?

As Europeans increasingly travel to other EU countries, for business, study or holidays, there is a need for a single number across the EU that they can easily remember even under the stress of an emergency situation. More than 90% of EU citizens agree on the usefulness of having one emergency number available in all European countries. In advocating 112, the European Commission wants to complement the freedom of movement that the Single European Market already offers to EU citizens.

What is the European Commission's role in 112?

The European Commission follows the implementation of 112 in EU countries through the Communication Committee, a body that unites the representatives of Member States' authorities responsible for telecoms. 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 Commission also takes legal action against countries that fail to comply with EU rules. To ensure that 112 works in all EU countries, the European Commission has so far launched 17 infringement proceedings against 15 countries due to the lack of availability of 112, of caller location or of appropriate handling of 112 calls.

Whilst a case on lack of caller location information against Italy is still pending (see [IP/09/1784](#)), the other cases have since been closed as national authorities have taken the necessary steps to comply with EU rules.

The European Commission is also financing research projects and other initiatives, such as *eCall* for automatic 112 calls in case of road accidents or *Reach112* for improved access to emergency services by disabled people through a combined transmission of voice, video and real time text.

The European Commission launched a [112 website](#) in June 2008 to inform citizens about how 112 works in all EU Member States. The website contains an interactive section dedicated to children and information from the latest reports on 112.

How widely known is 112?

Even though 112 has been operational for a number of years, its existence is still not widely known. A recent [Eurobarometer survey](#) showed that three out of four EU citizens are not aware they can call this number from anywhere in the EU. Almost two thirds of respondents to the survey also believe that people are not adequately informed about 112. The European Commission is therefore encouraging Member States to step up their awareness raising efforts.

In the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and Finland more than half of the population know about 112. However, Italy, Greece and the UK continue to have the lowest awareness levels in the EU as less than 10% of their citizens know about 112.

Since last year, there has been a very modest increase of 112 awareness at EU level (24% in 2009 compared to 25% in 2010). Only in Belgium, Slovakia, Poland, Latvia and Hungary are citizens significantly more aware of 112 in 2010 than in 2009.

What is European 112 Day?

On 11 February 2009, the European Commission, together with the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union established 11th February as the European 112 Day to increase awareness about the 112 ([IP/09/240](#)).

This year, the European 112 Day is marked throughout the EU with different activities, including the release of a 112 anthem in Romania and the distribution of a 112 eBook for schools in Slovakia.

The Commission supports actions taken by national authorities and has launched a short video on 112, available in all 23 EU official languages, to inform citizens about 112. The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Cyprus, Larnaca General Hospital in Cyprus, the Fire and Rescue Centre in Digne-les-Bains in France ,the Fire and Rescue Service in Alpes-de-Haute-Provence in France and the Police station of Timiș in Romania all participated in the making of the video.

The European Commission has today updated its dedicated website on 112. For more information, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/112>