

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, either from their fixed or from their mobile phone.

Why is the Commission advocating 112?

European citizens are increasingly travelling to other countries, for business or pleasure. There was a need for a single number across the EU that citizens would be able to remember even under the pressure 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. 112 is one of the concrete achievements of the European Single Market.

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, 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. There are exceptions: Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden use 112 as their only emergency number.

When was 112 created?

The European single emergency number 112 was introduced by the European Commission as early as 1991. 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 electronic communications. The European Commission also promotes 112 and takes legal actions against countries that fail to comply with EU rules.

The Commission has also set up an "**Expert Group on Emergency Access**" of national officials representing emergency response centres, civil protection and telecom 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.

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 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 in a situation where 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.

How is 112 working across the EU?

112 is available from both fixed and mobile telephones in all but one Member State, Bulgaria, which is still in the process of making it available nation-wide. In April 2008, Bulgaria was sent a formal warning by the European Commission in this regard ([IP/08/519](#)).

Even though 112 has been operational for a number of years already, its existence needs to be better promoted among citizens. The Eurobarometer survey published by the European Commission on 11 February 2008 ([IP/08/198](#)) showed that only 22% 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. The survey also showed that two out of three respondents believes that people are not adequately informed about 112.

What is "caller location"?

To help emergency services find accident 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 as to 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 (Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Sweden), and in 5 for mobile calls (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Luxembourg, Portugal). 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 at all in several countries. Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia are currently subject to EU infringement proceedings on this matter ([IP/07/1530](#), [IP/07/1785](#), [IP/08/519](#)).

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

112 operators are increasingly able to answer calls in other European Union languages. According to the information provided by Member States to the European Commission, this is currently possible in 17 countries: 112 emergency call centres can normally handle English-language calls in 16 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden). At least a part of national emergency centres can handle calls in German in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain. Calls in French can be handled in Bulgaria, Greece and Spain. Moreover, 7 countries informed the Commission that their 112 call centres, in particular those located in border areas, can answer in the language of a bordering Member State (Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Lithuania, Hungary, and Slovenia). In addition, several countries have special arrangements allowing call centres to answer in other foreign languages by forwarding calls to other call centres with competent multilingual staff on duty (the Czech Republic, Greece, Slovenia and Spain) or by using interpretation services (Finland, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK).

How long does it take to get connected to the emergency call handler?

Several Member States (the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) have taken measures to ensure that 112 calls are delivered to emergency call centres expeditiously. In particular, 112 is given priority routing over ordinary calls on the telephone networks and there are back-up measures in case of network failure or overload.

Apart from the general requirement of efficiency, there is no specific rule at EU level on how quickly a 112 call should be answered by a call handler after the telephone connection with the 112 centre is established (i.e. after the ring tone is heard). While average times to answer 112 calls have been reported by a number of Member States, the Commission has highlighted particularly efficient performances in the Czech Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom who provided data on the percentage of 112 calls answered within 20 seconds (100%, 97% and 98.1% respectively), and of the Netherlands and Finland that provided information on calls answered within 10 seconds (90% and 71% respectively)

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. 21 Member States have reported that mobile subscribers can call 112 in such a situation Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, 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 still needs to be improved?

Although EU Member States have made substantial progress in introducing 112 and making it work, improvements are still needed in the following areas:

- **information to citizens:** although awareness of 112 has grown in the EU over the past few years, there is still room for improvement. A recent [EU survey](#) found that a large majority of EU citizens are still unaware that the European emergency number 112 can be used across the EU in case of emergency: only 22% of EU citizens could spontaneously identify 112 as the number to call for emergency services in the EU.
- 6 Member States (Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) remain subject to infringement proceedings for non-availability of **caller location** in the case of mobile 112 calls. Still rather few Member States use the 'push' method recommended by the Commission to immediately deliver caller location to emergency services.
- **integrated emergency call centres**, coordinating various emergency services (ambulance, fire brigade, police), are not yet commonplace, even though they have proved their efficiency;
- the **foreign language capabilities of 112 emergency operators** should be further improved;
- **hoax and false calls** account for up to 90% of 112 calls in some Member States. These calls may overload emergency services and hamper their ability to provide a fast response to genuine emergency calls. While a number of Member States are taking technical and legal measures to reduce the numbers of hoax and false calls, there is also a clearly a need to educate the public about the proper use of 112 and the harm caused by hoax/false calls
- **automatic emergency calls:** from 2010 onwards, many cars will be able to alert the emergency services automatically or manually in the event of a crash. However, many Member States still need to upgrade their emergency rescue infrastructure (Public Service Answering Points or PSAPs) to enable them to receive and process the car's emergency messages (eCalls) which contain accurate location information ([IP/05/1137](#)).

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 is today launching a dedicated website on 112. For more information, see:

<http://ec.europa.eu/112>