

112 -the single European emergency number



112 is a telephone number that can be used to call emergency services anywhere in the European Union.

Why 112?

As European citizens travel more often to other countries, for business or pleasure, a single emergency number is needed. It should be the same number throughout the European Union (EU), so that citizens no longer need to remember several numbers, but only one, wherever they are.

What happens when you call 112?

People calling 112 are connected to an operator. Depending on the national civil protection system, the operator (who may be part of the police for example) will either deal with the request directly or transfer it to another one of the emergency services (ambulance, fire brigade). In many cases, operators are able to answer in more than one language.

Is 112 available throughout the European Union?

112 is available in all but one Member State. The remaining one – Bulgaria – is taking steps to introduce 112 nation-wide. The Commission monitors the introduction and functioning of 112 in Member States, in particular through its Communication Committee, which gathers the representatives of Member State authorities responsible for electronic communications.

Is 112 accessible to all?

Not everyone can easily call 112 in an emergency. People with hearing or speech impairments, senior citizens or people with serious injuries may find it difficult to call and explain what has happened. A 112 multimedia service named "Total Conversation" will offer solutions.

This service, to be tested in the next months, will allow users to alert emergency teams through a combination of voice, video and real-time-text. This means that emergency centres will receive more complete information (image, text description) enabling them to ensure the best possible response with the shortest possible delay. Such a service can be life saving.

What should Member States do?

According to EU legislation¹, Member States must ensure that users of any type of telephone, fixed or mobile, are able to call 112 free of charge.

In addition, 112 calls must be appropriately answered and handled. Some Member States (Sweden, Denmark and The Netherlands) have introduced 112 as their sole emergency number, while in most Member States, 112 operates alongside national emergency numbers. The quality of the response to emergency calls should be the same, irrespective of whether 112 or other national emergency numbers are 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, all EU countries must inform citizens (nationals and visitors) of the existence of 112 and under which circumstances they should call it.

¹ Directive 2002/22/EC of 7 March 2002 (Universal Service Directive)

What can still be improved?

Although Member States have made substantial progress in introducing 112 and making it work in the EU, they still need to improve the following areas:

- information to citizens: although awareness of 112 has risen in the EU over the past few years, recent surveys indicate that there is still room for improvement;
- in some Member States, emergency centres are still unable to determine the location of a caller;
- integrated emergency centres, combining ambulance, fire brigade and police, are not yet common, although they have proved to be efficient;
- the ability of operators and personnel in emergency centres to speak several languages;
- dealing with hoax and false calls, which in some countries can account for more than 60% of calls to emergency services and pose a threat to the efficiency of the emergency response;
- automatic in-vehicle emergency calls: according to an action plan agreed between the Commission and industry, all new cars should be equipped with "eCall" from 2010 onwards. This technology will call the emergency services in case of an accident, using 112 to send accident data, including the car's location. Many Member States need to upgrade their infrastructure to enable the emergency services to receive and process the "eCall" data.

What is the Commission doing?

The Commission will continue to play an active role in promoting 112, and will take legal action if necessary. However, the responsibility for the organisation of the emergency services and the response to 112 and national emergency calls rests with the Member States.

To encourage and help Member States to ensure that 112 works satisfactorily across the EU, the Commission regularly exchanges views with the Member States in the framework of the Communications Committee and outlines best practices in implementing 112.

The Commission has also set up a specialised body, the Expert Group on Emergency Access, consisting of Member State officials representing emergency response centres, civil protection and telecommunication authorities. This expert 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 is also active to make 112 more accessible for people with disabilities. On the one hand, it has proposed to improve the 112 accessibility for citizens with disabilities in its current reform of Europe's telecommunications rules. On the other hand, the Commission will fund a pilot service, "Total Conversation", making the 112 number accessible to all across Europe. This service is developed under CIP, a special programme intended to foster competitiveness and innovation.

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