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For 999 read 112

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The European Commissioner for the Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes has written to EU Member States calling on them to intensify their efforts to raise awareness of Europe's single emergency number 112.

While awareness has increased slightly, three out of four EU citizens still do not know they can call 112 in an emergency to contact the police, fire brigade or medical services, either from home or when travelling in the EU.

A recent Eurobarometer survey shows that just a quarter (25%) of EU citizens questioned could spontaneously identify 112 as the number to call emergency services anywhere in the EU. This is only one percentage point improvement at EU level since 2009 (up from 24%). In some countries however, citizens are much more aware of 112 as the EU-wide emergency number than last year: Belgium and Slovakia (9 percentage point improvement), Slovenia (up 7 percentage points) and Poland (up 6 percentage points), Lithuania and Hungary (up 5 percentage points). In the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and Finland more than half of the population know about 112. However, like last year, in Italy, Greece and the UK less than 10% of citizens know about 112, the lowest awareness levels in the EU.

In 21 EU countries the European emergency number 112 appears in telephone directories and on emergency vehicles in 20 EU countries. However, only 22% of EU citizens said they have received information related to 112, according to the report. A majority (62%) also said they are not sufficiently informed about the EU emergency number.

Many citizens also face language problems: one in ten people had difficulties in communicating in another language when calling 112 while abroad, even though Member States say their 112 emergency centres can handle 112 calls at least in English.

Receiving information about the location of 112 callers can speed up the arrival of emergency services, reduce the severity of injuries and even save lives. Call centres in 20 EU countries (compared to 9 countries in 2008) almost instantly give emergency services the location of 112 callers thanks to 'push' or near-instant 'pull' location systems. However, the Commission has taken legal action against Italy as caller location information is not yet provided to emergency services for 112 calls from mobile phones

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