

112 - Europe's lifeline

Most Europeans still do not know they can call 112 anywhere in the EU to contact the police, fire brigade or an ambulance.

What phone number can you use to call emergency services anywhere in the EU? A recent survey shows that just 25% of Europeans know the answer - 112 - nearly two decades after the number was introduced.

In the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and Finland, more than 50% of respondents knew the 112 number. But in Italy, Greece and the UK only 10% were able to answer the question.

The EU-commissioned survey also reveals that most Europeans support having a single EU-wide emergency number but feel not enough has been done to make people aware of it.

In response to the findings, the commission has written to EU countries urging them to promote the number more actively, saying it will save lives and reduce severe injuries. The number is already listed in phonebooks and appears on emergency vehicles in most countries.

The survey was published on 11 February - designated '112 day' in Europe. Some countries have organised events to raise awareness of the hotline. Romania has enlisted singer and actress Monica Anghel to be its '112 ambassador,' a role that includes visiting schools.

One in four EU citizens has called an emergency number in the past five years. About half used national emergency numbers that exist alongside 112. But the share of those dialling 112 has increased.

Language continues to be a problem. One in 10 respondents who had called 112 abroad complained they had difficulty communicating with the operator. In most cases the calls were handled in the language of the country they were visiting. All 112 operators are required to speak English.

The hotline is free and works from any phone - fixed line or mobile. It puts people in touch with an operator who will alert the appropriate service - police, fire or ambulance.



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