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Emergency number 112: European Commission says EU single emergency number must get multilingual

Thu, Feb 12 2009 11:27 CET | by [Clive Leviev-Sawyer](#) | 145 Views

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Since December 2008, EU citizens can contact emergency services from anywhere in the European Union by dialing 112, the EU-wide emergency number, free of charge from both fixed and mobile phones. But, only one in four Europeans knows that this life-saving number exists in other member states and almost three in 10 112 callers in other countries have encountered language problems.

The European Commission, along with the European Parliament and the Council, declared February 11 "European 112 Day" to spread the word about 112 and push national authorities to make the EU's single emergency number more multilingual.

"The European emergency number should no longer be Europe's best kept secret. We have a single emergency number, 112, that works for every emergency and every member state and every citizen that needs it. But it is unacceptable that less than a quarter of citizens are aware of 112, or that language barriers prevent travellers calling 112 from communicating with the emergency operator," EU Telecoms Commissioner Viviane Reding said.

"The EU must work to guarantee the safety of our 500 million citizens with the same intensity as we have worked to guarantee their ability to travel freely across the borders of 27 countries. Europe's first 112 day should act as a wake up call to national authorities who need to improve the number of languages available in their 112 emergency centres and boost awareness about this life-saving number."

An EU-wide survey conducted for the European Commission shows that 94 per cent of EU citizens think it is useful to have a single emergency number available in the EU.

A Eurobarometer survey published on February 11 2009 also highlighted areas where there is still room for improvement:

Language problems: 28 per cent of callers have language problems when they call 112 while abroad, despite the fact that information provided by 21 member states indicates that their 112 emergency centres should be able to handle 112 calls in English (12 Member States in German and 11 Member States in French).

Awareness of 112: Overall, only 24 per cent of surveyed Europeans could spontaneously identify 112 as the number on which they can call emergency services anywhere in the EU. This is a two per cent improvement since February 2008 but knowledge of the EU's emergency number varies greatly between countries, from three per cent in Italy to 58 per cent in the Czech Republic.

Many member states are informing their citizens and visitors about 112, for example: in Finland 112 day is celebrated annually on February 11; visitors to Bulgaria receive a welcome text message informing them about 112; 112 is publicised on motorways and toll gates in Austria, Greece and Spain and at train stations and airports in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Greece and the Netherlands, among others.

Media campaigns are organised in Sweden before the travel season informing citizens about 112.

At least a 10 per cent increase in awareness of 112 was seen in Bulgaria, Sweden, Romania, Lithuania, and Portugal in the past year.

The Eurobarometer survey also showed that a quarter of EU citizens have called an emergency number in the past five years.

Most still are made from fixed lines: while 53 per cent of calls were made from a fixed line, there was an increase in emergency calls made from mobile phones (45 per cent compared to 42 per cent in 2008).

The EC said that it, along with individual member states, would step up their efforts to publicise 112, especially before the summer holiday period.

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