



FALSE EMERGENCY CALLS



False emergency calls impact emergency services across the world. How do different countries deal with this challenge? What kind of calls are classified as 'false'?

FALSE EMERGENCY CALLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All emergency services are affected by false emergency calls. False emergency calls divert emergency services away from people who may be in life-threatening situations and who need urgent help. This can mean the difference between life and death for someone in trouble.

False emergency calls are also an expensive problem because emergency services need to multiply their resources to assure they are not being overloaded by inappropriate calls and therefore may not be able to respond to real emergencies.

European emergency services combat false emergency calls using different approaches. The scope of this document is to assemble all the information about this issue and outline some of the 'best practice' approaches from the authorities' perspective. As a conclusion, recommendations and EENA requirements are described.

One of the objectives of this document is to agree on a single classification of false emergency calls. Furthermore, this will help to ensure that statistics about false emergency calls are comparable.

This document also reports on the practices of European countries to combat false emergency calls. The description of practices was obtained through information sent by EENA members.



False emergency calls divert resources away from people in danger. This document will explore how false calls are defined in different countries and the steps that can be taken to address this widespread issue.



There are a variety of ways to combat false emergency calls, including: education of the public, introducing sanctions, communication campaigns, and adaptation of call-handling procedures, among others.

1 | DEFINITION OF FALSE EMERGENCY CALL

The concept of false emergency calls is not always the same for all emergency services in European countries. The aim of this section of the document is to describe the main definitions. It does not mean that all definitions are valid for all PSAPs.

Unintentional false emergency calls	Pocket calls	A false emergency call is when somebody dials the emergency number accidentally (e.g. pocket calls from mobile handsets, even with the keypad locked), then it disconnects or stays silent or there is sufficient background noise to advise the PSAP operator that the call is false.
	Inappropriate judgement of emergency situation	A false emergency call is when somebody contacts the emergency services to tell them that there is an emergency. The situation is not considered an emergency by the emergency services, but it is for the caller (e.g. losing home keys).
	Automatic false emergency calls	False emergency calls can be made by automatic devices (alarms, security equipment, etc.) which are not functioning well. When being misused, the person misusing the device may not be aware of the automatic call being made (e.g. in some cities, taxi drivers can push an SOS button that generates an alarm).
	Fault generated false emergency calls	False emergency calls can be generated by faults in networks or customer equipment because switches in fixed line networks may still need to recognise loop-disconnect dialling.
	Misdials	A person can accidentally dial an emergency number when trying to reach a number with similar code, e.g. 111 or 118, or when using unfamiliar equipment (dialling digits accidentally).
Deliberate false emergency calls	Information	A false emergency call is when somebody contacts the emergency services just to ask or speak about something that is not an emergency (e.g. ask for administrative information; speak with an operator about the news, etc.).
	Hoax call	A false emergency or malicious call is when a person deliberately telephones the emergency services and tells them that there is an emergency when there is not (e.g. somebody makes up that there is an accident in a location when in reality nothing has happened).
	Child playing	A child may call and simply shout, scream, or say something silly to the call-taker. There are often several children heard in the background.
	Psychiatric illness	A person who has a form of psychiatric illness may call the emergency services, sometimes repeatedly, to report what may be an imagined or exaggerated incident.
	Abusive	An abusive call is when a person contacts the emergency services and is rude or insulting towards the call-taker without trying to report an emergency incident.
	Immediate hang-up	A false emergency call is when somebody calls up and then hangs up deliberately.
	Silent call	A false emergency call is when somebody calls up and stays silent deliberately. (Please note that this does not mean that all silent calls are false emergency calls.)

2 | FIGHTING FALSE EMERGENCY CALLS

2.1 | MEASURES TO FIGHT FALSE EMERGENCY CALLS

In some countries, public authorities have taken steps to fight against false emergency calls. Efforts can be made to prevent misuse of emergency services (before false emergency calls are made) and also to try to punish abusive behaviours (after false emergency calls are made).

Education

Education is the fundamental pillar to avoid misuse of emergency numbers. All emergency services receive a lot of false emergency calls made by children. The misuse of emergency numbers can be reduced by educating children about when to call emergency services. Unfortunately, not only children use emergency numbers incorrectly. Adults too have to be informed about when to dial them.

Welcome message

In some countries, the call is not answered directly by an operator. A very short message explains that the caller is trying to contact the emergency services and asks him to stay on line only if help is needed. This type of pre-recorded message reduces the number of false emergency calls answered by operators.

Communication

Regular communication in campaigns, intervals in public areas and TV commercials in order to emphasise the proper use of the emergency number and the impact of improper use on the emergency services.

Warnings

The number of false emergency calls is so high that in some cases, warning measures have to be used. Emergency services receive data together with the calls. The phone number of the caller and its location are now available in a very high proportion of calls received. In some countries, public authorities have decided to warn citizens about the fact that they can be identified in case of misuse of emergency numbers. Several countries have also decided to warn people that they can be prosecuted if they make false emergency calls. In some cases, they even use media as warning mechanisms (i.e. by releasing information about the offender and the offense).





Prosecution and sanctions

Other, stronger measures include prosecuting and sanctioning the people who misuse emergency numbers. The phone number of these people can also be blacklisted or blocked. In most countries, hoax callers have to compensate costs related to the unnecessary mobilisation of emergency services (in some cases this is done even if no resource is mobilised).

Cooperation with network providers to study possible impacts of new technologies

Technological developments and their implementation can and do have an impact on services like 112. Therefore it is very important to have strategic talks with network providers in order to minimise the negative consequences and to maximise the possible benefits.

Use of call-backs

Use of call-backs to a number to establish whether or not an emergency incident exists.

Careful call handling processes

Call handling processes that include standard questions to filter false emergency calls, for example asking a child if their parent can come to the phone.

Network filters

Faults in the terminal or access network that cause wires to intermittently touch can readily generate "1", or even "2", in network switches that still have to recognise loop-disconnect dialling of numbers. To minimise the number of such calls, a network filter can be used that involves a 4 second wait after 112 is detected to check for extra digits. If received, the call can be terminated.



2.2 | IMPORTANCE OF THE CALLER LINE IDENTIFICATION (CLI)

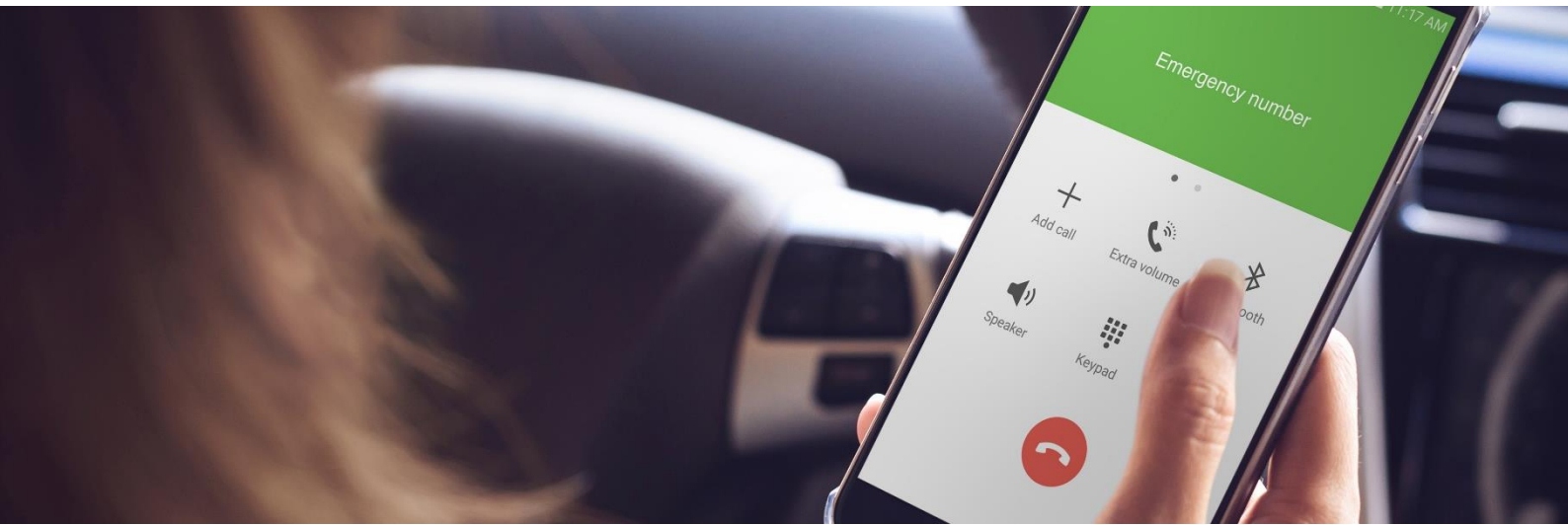
Receiving the phone number of the caller is the first step in combatting false emergency calls. This information is the only link to the person who has contacted the emergency services and is the key for tracing the source of false emergency calls.

Suppressing the transmission of this information has an unfavourable effect on the amount of false emergency calls. For this reason, efforts have been made to guarantee that the correct caller line identification (with no amendments) arrives to the PSAP. It is important to mention that a critical problem for PSAPs is the difficulty of receiving the correct caller line identification, especially for mobile customers who are roaming (national and international).

In cases where no SIM card is installed in the phone, caller line identification is not available. Misusers of emergency phone numbers take advantage of the anonymity associated with SIM-less mobile phones. The short duration of many SIM-less calls suggests that a large proportion of them are test calls. In some countries, emergency service organisations have decided to block SIM-less¹ calls as the high volume of SIM-less false emergency calls handled presents a severe risk to their operational efficiency and effectiveness. These calls divert resources from genuine emergencies.

It is also worth mentioning that it is not possible to prove that the caller is the owner of the telephone device. However, at least measures can be taken against the phone number. The name of the owner of the line can be identified if they have a contract for a mobile or fixed line. Nevertheless, it is not always the case for pre-paid contracts. In some countries, it has become mandatory to provide the name of the phone's owner even for pre-paid contracts.

¹ The argument for countries that have limited the access to 112 from SIM-less phones is that the Directive 2002/22/EC provides that citizens shall be able to call 112 from any telephone. A telephone is defined by these countries by its connection with the switch. For a fixed phone to be connected to a switch, it must have a physical link and a user terminal identification. For a mobile phone to be connected to a switch, it must be in the coverage area of a mobile phone network and must have a SIM in order to be identified.



2.3 | TECHNOLOGY

Technology can also help emergency services to reduce the consequences of the misuse of emergency numbers.

- **Availability of International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI):** If the caller's phone number is not available (e.g. for SIM-less calls), the IMEI is the only available data to carry out actions against the phone through which emergency numbers are misused, even though there is no certitude of the caller's identity.
- **Location of the caller:** The operator can find out the address of where the call is being made from. This data can be used to check if the information given by the caller is consistent with the location.
- **Possibility to check if more calls have been received from this caller:** Storing the phone / IMEI number of a caller who has made false emergency calls can be very useful in warning the operator that this person may be misusing the number again. This information is also very useful for warning and prosecution measures.
- **Possibility to change the call's priority in the queue:** If the number of the caller is already marked as false emergency caller and there are calls in the queue, all calls received from this number can be the last to be handled by an operator.
- **Possibility to route calls without caller line identification to a different queue:** A high number of calls without caller line identification that reach the PSAP are in the end considered as false emergency calls. This is the reason why some emergency services have decided to route these calls to an automatic message that asks the caller to press a number if an emergency operator is really needed.
- **All calls to the emergency services are voice recorded:** Recording calls provides emergency services with the possibility of using the call recording against the misuser of the emergency number.
- **Automatic SMS:** Some emergency services use SMS as a means to warn false emergency callers. Automating the sending of messages saves time for emergency services and improves the process.

- **Automatic voice bombing:** Some emergency services use voicemail messages as a means to warn false emergency callers. Automating the sending of messages saves time for emergency services and improves the process.
- **Automatic exclusion:** Some emergency services use temporary exclusion as a means to warn false emergency callers. The owner of the blocked phone can ask to be de-blocked by identifying themselves to the PSAP via a specific telephone number. De-blocking is also automated after a maximum of 24 hours.
- **Automatic welcome message:** Emergency services can welcome callers with an automatic voice message. False emergency callers can be discouraged from waiting for an operator and may release the line.
- **Automatic, pre-recorded messages:** Pre-recorded messages can be accessible in the operators' interface. Once the operator has realised that the caller is not in an emergency situation, the call can be sent to an automatic message.
- **Use of an Interactive Voice Response system:** This may help to manage suspected false emergency calls and to supplement normal questions from PSAP call-takers.
- **Statistics:** The storage and classification of data can be very helpful in establishing how efficient measures were in reducing the number of false emergency calls.
- **Other facilities:** Tools such as CCTV can be used to detect offenders.
- **Calls coming from SIM-less handsets not permitted:** However, this measure may not be accepted in some countries.
- **Keypad lock changes for mobile handsets:** For example, several manufacturers' handsets re-set the keypad lock 5 seconds after it has been unlocked if the SEND key is not used within this period. This may help to reduce pocket dials.
- **Network filters if extra digits after emergency number are received:** This is taken as an indication that the handset was pressed by accident.



2.4 | EXAMPLES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Here are some examples of how different countries handle false emergency calls:

Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No blacklisting – you never know when there is an emergency. • The Estonian Emergency Response Centre is focusing on serial callers who are making false emergency calls and dealing with this problem on a case by case basis. • Punishable according to the Penal Code when a false call results in a false dispatch order.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The law from 2011 gives the opportunity of preventing access of a certain subscriber to 112, if the Emergency Response Centre Agency's (ERC) command and control centre believes the caller is harassing ERC services. This is always reported to police.
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preselection of incoming calls is carried out to fight false emergency calls.
Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In case of repetitive false emergency calls from the same number (such as abusive, drunk callers, silent or network/equipment generated calls), all calls received from this number over the next hours can be sent to a special filter and postponed there for up to 140 seconds. • A recorded message (9 or 18 seconds) is used for calls from SIM-less devices and numbers are sent to the filter. • All calls reporting false threats, bombs, etc. are considered offences under the Code of Administrative Offenses and the Criminal Code and are punishable. • Education of schoolchildren carried out.
The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMS bombing (multiple messages). • Voice bombing (multiple messages). • Temporary exclusion: The number is blocked for a short period of time. The owner of the blocked phone can ask to be de-blocked by identifying themselves to the PSAP via a specific telephone number. De-blocking is also automated after a maximum of 24 hours. • Criminal investigation and jurisdiction. • All these measures can be implemented with different thresholds.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIM-less calls to 112 are not permitted. • Education campaigns in schools and visits to PSAPs for children, Open Doors Days with live public demonstrations. • Increased communication on social media and other channels. • Press releases for raising awareness on the right way to use the emergency number, with statistics on the number of false emergency calls. • Significant changes within the legal framework (increased fines, community service). • The use of enhanced mobile location technologies: Advanced Mobile Location (AML), Apel 112 (112 Call) mobile app, HTML 5 Geolocation) • Promoting the use of Apel 112 (Call 112) mobile app, which also provides GPS coordinates of the callers, on various new and traditional media channels (social media campaigns, TV & radio spots). • With the update of the 112 system in the near future, there is the intention to implement an Interactive Voice Response service for false emergency calls, where the callers would be informed of the consequences of abusive calling before being redirected to the 112 inbox. • Call-backs and caller number identification (with the hope of soon also using ISMI information), historical 112 call checks from the same caller/number. • Regular statistics of abusive calls are sent to the relevant authorities for punitive measures and fines.



3 | CALL HANDLING PROCEDURE FOR FALSE EMERGENCY CALLS

3.1 | RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE

1. If possible, the operator checks if there is any information held regarding previous calls made from this number.
2. The operator asks the caller his/her location and compares it with the automatically received location.
3. The operator asks the caller specific questions. In some cases, the call-taker may transfer the call to a specialised dispatcher (e.g. a doctor, a police officer, or a fire-fighter, on-site or off-site) for further verification.
4. If the caller is not in an emergency situation, the operator tags the call as false. This way, the number of the caller will be identified in the future.
5. In case of recurring false emergency calls from the same number, the operator may have the possibility of adding it to a black-list, warning the caller, or sending an automatic SMS, etc.

3.2 | CLASSIFICATION OF CALLS

For a common understanding of the problem, calls received in PSAPs can be categorised as follows:

- Real emergency calls: calls that are concerning imminent threats to life, property, or environment.
- False emergency calls: calls that are not real emergencies. These could be, but are not limited to: abusive calls, children playing with phones, misdial, information calls, calls from people with mental health problems, calls needing the authorities' help but not involving imminent threats to life, property, or environment.

To be able to compare statistics of different European countries, the following categories should be used as labels for the type of false emergency calls:

Inappropriate judgement of emergency situation	When somebody contacts the emergency services to tell them that there is an emergency. The situation is not considered an emergency by the emergency services, but it is for the caller (e.g. lost house keys).
Information	When somebody contacts the emergency services just to ask something or to speak about something that is not an emergency (e.g. ask for administrative information; speak with an operator about the news, etc.)
Hoax call	When a person deliberately phones the emergency services and tells them there is an emergency when there is not.
Abusive (including calls made by children playing and people with psychiatric illness)	<p>When a person contacts the emergency services and is rude or insulting towards the PSAP call-taker without trying to report an emergency incident.</p> <p>A child may call and simply shout, scream, or say something silly to the PSAP call-taker. There are often several children heard in the background.</p> <p>A person who has some form of psychiatric illness may call the emergency services, sometimes repeatedly, to report what may be an imaginary or exaggerated incident.</p>
Immediate hang up	When somebody calls up and then hangs up deliberately.
Silent call	When somebody calls up and stays silent deliberately.
Accidental	This could be from pocket-dials on a mobile handset or someone misdialling a number. Calls can either be quickly ended by the person realising what they have done or could be silent (or just background noise) as the person is unaware that they have made the call.
Network/Equipment generated	False emergency calls can be generated by faults in the network or a customer's premises, e.g. in public networks that still recognise loop-disconnect dialling, or by automated alarms.
Miscellaneous	Other false emergency calls



3.3 | PROCEDURES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, operators are instructed, trained, and assessed in defining and handling false emergency calls. According to the procedures, assessment is on a regular basis. Only then it is possible to maintain a high level of accuracy and a successful follow up for criminal investigation and jurisdiction.

The system itself checks the thresholds of misuse labels and shows the call history and the location data in the GIS during the call with the operator.

SPAIN

According to the Spanish Criminal Code, calls which are considered an offence are those concerning false bomb threats, or threats related to dangerous goods (chemical or toxic goods). Regional legislation on emergency management involves the prosecution of offenders; not all regions have this type of legislation in place already and some that have it choose not to act on it unless it is an extreme situation.

SIM-less calls are permitted to 112 (only). The Ministry of the Interior issued a law, in effect since November 2010, forcing all phone lines in Spain to be linked to a subscriber (even for pre-paid SIM cards). All unidentified phone lines were disconnected.

Many PSAPs in Spain rely on the call-takers' and dispatchers' experience for the identification of false emergency calls, with the main support of ANI/CLI databases, the POSIC mobile call location protocol (location information is pushed with the call) and the possibility of displaying the previous call history from the same number. Not all PSAPs use blacklists (the ones that use blacklists typically send calls to a different queue linked with the Interactive Voice Response system).

The way PSAPs act against offenders varies a lot from one region to another. Some regions issue warnings before filing formal complaints and/or fining offenders (if

offenders are minors, educational measures are usually taken instead). Some regions use small fines together with press releases to discourage future offenses.

IRELAND

In Ireland, the PSAP 112/999 operator is trained to identify and handle false emergency calls. As the PSAP is responsible for forwarding the call to whatever emergency service is requested by the caller, the PSAP 112/999 operator will carry out this request in full and in good faith. The PSAP does not have the statutory authority to block any numbers from dialling 112 (or 999); this can only be authorised by a senior police officer. As a result, the PSAP's visibility of all false emergency calls is only limited to those that are within their control (i.e. young children playing, network faults etc.); it does not have any visibility of calls that initially are forwarded but later turn out to be false.

If the PSAP 112/999 operator suspects that the call is not a genuine emergency call, it applies the necessary procedure to triage the call and close the call as appropriate. Using probing questions such as "can you ask your mummy to come to the phone?" when dealing with a young child, for instance, can help the PSAP 112/999 agent to establish whether the call is genuine (and should be forwarded to the police) or false (and should be subsequently closed).

SWEDEN

In Sweden, the organisation responsible for handling emergency calls – SOS Alarm – provides a detailed break-down of information regarding the volume and type of false emergency calls. The 2019 report can be found [here](#).²

With regards to public relations, a lot of information is provided on when to use the emergency number 112 and when to use the non-emergency numbers (1177; medical health information line, 113 13; information on serious accidents or crisis, 114 14; non-emergency to the police). Information is found on the SOS Alarm website and those of specific services (e.g. krisinfo.se, the police).

Efforts are also made on social media (Twitter and Facebook). Alongside, SOS Alarm also participates in campaigns with actors such as the police. In 2018 and 2019, a TV series was created about SOS Alarm, which gave the public insight into 112 and the organisation's work.

For several years, emergency call-takers have been able to switch a caller that is not in need of emergency help to a spoken message. For example, if a caller dials 112 but should have called 114 14 instead (non-emergency number to the police), the caller can be switched to an automated message that informs them that they should not have called 112. The message also informs them of the correct number to call. These messages can also be used in case of abusive calls to 112. By using these messages, the call-taker can be freed to take another call, making more resources available for the handling of genuine emergency cases.

²<https://www.sosalarm.se/contentassets/e58773771df0492b8af379f475161d97/112-rapporten-2019.pdf>

4 | RECOMMENDATIONS

As a summary of this document, the following recommendations are proposed regarding how to combat different types of false emergency calls and inform the stakeholders involved. It is not intended that all measures are taken in all cases. Some emergency service organisations may not agree on some of these points.

Type of false emergency calls		How to fight against it
Unintentional false emergency calls	Pocket calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for keypad locking • Handset design (some keypad locks are more likely to make accidental emergency calls) • Review which emergency call numbers are programmed into SIM or handset
Unintentional false emergency calls	Inappropriate judgement of emergency situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Ask callers to report their non-emergency call on another number; do not continue to take their details on 112 to organise a response.
Unintentional false emergency calls	Automatic false emergency calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance
Unintentional false emergency calls	Fault generated false emergency calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network filtering
Unintentional false emergency calls	Misdials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Automatic welcome message
Deliberate	Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Automatic welcome message
Deliberate	Hoax call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Warning • Prosecution
Deliberate	Child playing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Warning to parents
Deliberate	Psychiatric illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warning • Prosecution • Warning to relatives / doctors
Deliberate	Abusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Warning • Prosecution
Deliberate	Immediate hang up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Automatic welcome message • Warning • Prosecution
Deliberate	Silent call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology (to detect if a deaf, hard of hearing or mute person is behind the silent call) • Education • Automatic welcome message • Warning • Prosecution
Misuse/abuse 112 by SIM-less or SIM card-less calls		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMEI transmission • Possibility to block the handset using IMEI • Education • Technical allowing only SIM calls (some countries may not agree)³

³ If a user dials 112 outside the coverage area of its mobile network operator, the caller will be automatically connected to another network operator in national roaming. In this case, the call to 112 could be treated as a SIM-less call from the hosting GSM/UMTS network.



5 | EENA REQUIREMENTS

	Requirements
Statistics	Ensure that statistics about false emergency calls are available. Without statistical evidence, it is impossible to establish comparisons and reports.
Classification of calls	Different types of false emergency calls should be described. False emergency calls should be classified. Consistency of approach is needed to ensure the same or similar meanings apply to each PSAP.
Procedure	Ensure a clear procedure is well-known by call-takers for handling false emergency calls (the procedure may be extended to dispatchers receiving call transfers).
Description of measures	Detailed analysis of measures to fight against false emergency calls is to be made available.
Result of taken measures	Efficiency of taken measures should be calculated.



6 | ANNEX: STATISTICS

The Communication Committee (COCOM) from the European Commission monitors the introduction and functioning of 112 in the European Union Member States. It should be noted that the definition used by the COCOM is not the same as the previous chapter of this document. In the 2019 COCOM report⁴, 17 EU Member States⁵ and Iceland provided information on false emergency calls.⁶ The report demonstrates a considerable difference between the percentage of false emergency calls in each country.

Country	False calls to emergency numbers (%)
Germany	8
Iceland	17
Finland	18
Belgium	20
Czechia	26
Spain	31
Poland	32
United Kingdom	34
Bulgaria	35
Netherlands	35
Croatia	38
Italy	39
Romania	51
Hungary	54
Estonia	59
Portugal	60
Greece	65
Malta	86

Source: COCOM Report 2019

⁴Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/2019-report-implementation-european-emergency-number-112>

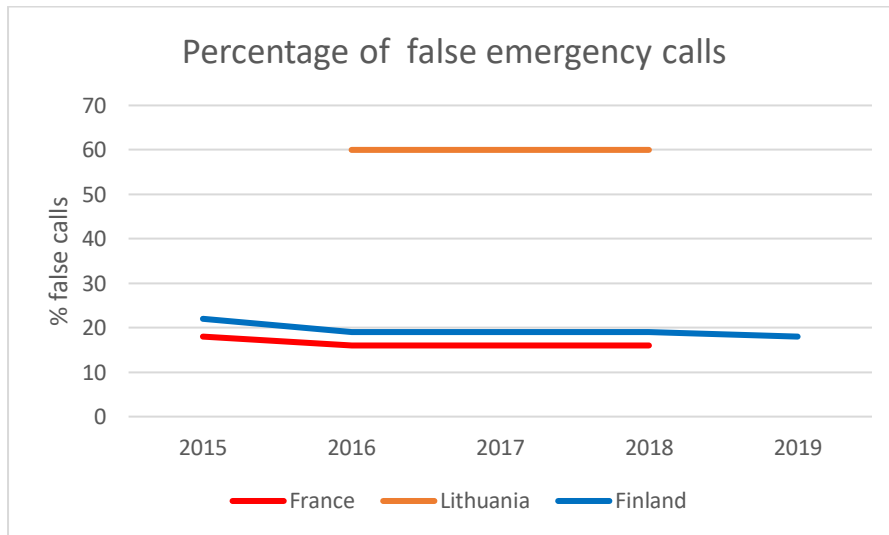
⁵ At the time of compiling the report, the United Kingdom was still an EU Member State.

⁶ The figures refer to "calls which are not followed up with intervention or assistance from the PSAP or emergency services."

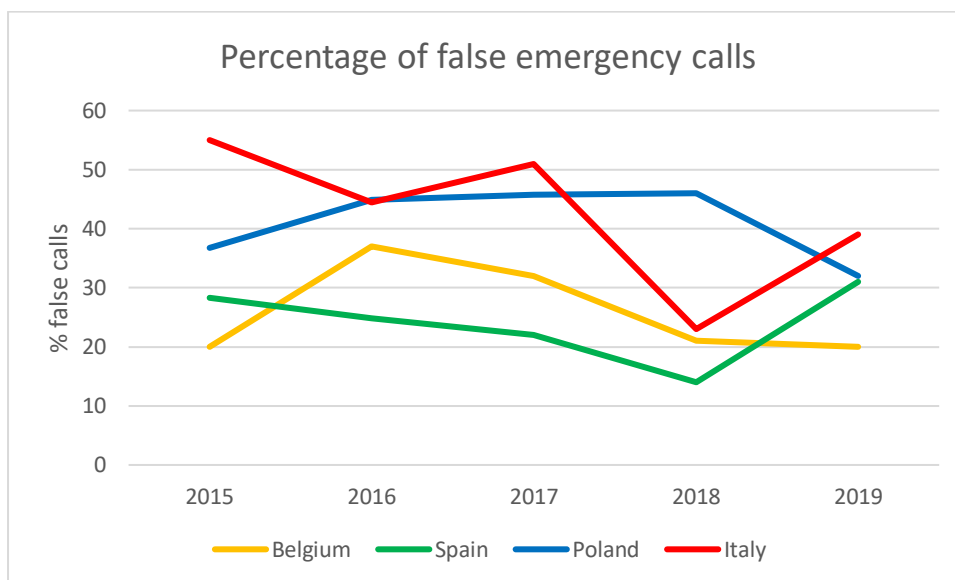
EVOLUTION OF FALSE EMERGENCY CALLS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

The following figures are based on the data provided in the European Commission's COCOM reports 2016-2020.⁷

In some countries, the number of false emergency calls has remained constant or has decreased slightly.



Some countries demonstrate fluctuating trends:



⁷ The year in the graph corresponds to the year of the data collection. For instance, the 2020 report is based on data collection from 2019.

Although a small number of countries, such as Portugal, Malta and Luxembourg, have demonstrated an increase in the reported percentage of false emergency calls, many countries demonstrate overall decreases in false emergency calls:

