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International Wireless Calls to 9-1-1

CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS & PRACTICAL STEPS FOR PSAP/ECCS • MEMBER INFORMATION SUMMARY

Voice Only	No Callback	Tower-Level	Check OTT	FIFA '26
TEXT-TO-911 FAILS FROM FOREIGN SIMS	ON-SCREEN NUMBER CAN'T BE DIALED BACK	LOCATION OFTEN COARSE, NOT PRECISE	HOLDS THE REAL NUMBER AND LOCATION	PREPARE FOR THE VISITOR SURGE

International wireless 9-1-1 calls often arrive without a usable callback number, precise location, or working text capability. NENA testing across multiple U.S. regions traced these failures to **the way foreign phones route emergency calls back through their home carrier (S8 Home Routing over VoLTE)**, not to local PSAP systems, so they sit largely outside any single 9-1-1 authority's control. With international visitor volume climbing ahead of the **2026 FIFA World Cup**, PSAP/ECCs should prepare now with the tools they already have rather than wait on long-term standards and carrier fixes.

WHAT TO EXPECT TODAY

- **Voice usually routes**, but expect setup delays (sometimes over a minute) or outright failures; a second attempt placed moments later often connects.
- **Text-to-911 fails universally** from foreign SIMs. Home-routing (S8HR) sends the message back to the visitor's home carrier, which cannot reach U.S. text-to-911. Treat voice as the only path.
- Calls arrive flagged as **Non-Service-Initialized (NSI)**. The callback field shows a placeholder number with a 9-1-1 area code, not the caller's real, dialable number.
- **Location is often coarse**, usually just the serving cell tower with a wide uncertainty radius. The precise device-based location you get from domestic smartphones rarely reaches the call-handling screen for these callers.
- **Outbound callback is often blocked** at the PBX, carrier, or OTT level, even when you have a correct international number.
- **Supplemental data (OTT) platforms** may hold the real international callback number (full E.164 format) and a precise location, but delivery is inconsistent and number formats vary.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- **Test your own environment** with devices and SIMs/eSIMs from multiple countries; document call delivery, ANI/ALI, location quality, and callback ability to build a local risk profile.
- **Operationalize OTT platforms.** Give every PST a working login and training, and reinforce that NSI calls may still carry usable data in the supplemental portal.
- **Fix outbound international calling.** Work with PBX and network providers to unblock it (or set up a supervisor line, desk phone, or WhatsApp callback as a fallback).
- **Write SOPs and job aids** for recognizing international calls, dialing E.164 formats, and a one-page country-code reference.
- **Engage partners early**: carriers, OTT vendors, and event or venue teams. Share test data and push for consistent number formatting.
- **Plan for language and outreach.** Assess interpretation capacity (consider AI translation/transcription) and push voice-only, stay-on-the-line messaging to visitors.

Source: National Emergency Number Association, "International Wireless Calls to 9-1-1: Challenges, Limitations, and Practical Steps for 9-1-1 PSAP/ECCs" (March 20, 2026). Summary prepared by the Alabama 9-1-1 Board for NASNA member distribution. Refer to the full NENA white paper for complete technical detail and citations.