



Best Practices on the Application of SSR Codes and Assistance Service





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Purpose

Air transport is complex and involves many stakeholders. The smooth functioning of the air transport network requires a carefully coordinated industry approach to standardise certain basic functions, such as airport and airline codes, reservations, ticketing, and passenger handling.

This document aims to help travel agents and air transportation industry employees consistently apply the International Air Transport Association (IATA)'s disability-related Special Service Request (SSR) codes to ensure safe, accessible, and dignified air travel for passengers with disabilities.

What are SSR Codes for Accessibility?

When travelling by air, passengers with disabilities may require services and assistance to facilitate their travel experience.

When a passenger with a disability communicates their accommodation request either verbally or via a web-based/mobile application to a travel agent or airline employee, this request must be captured correctly so airlines and their employees may be adequately prepared to meet the passenger's needs. Otherwise, the passenger may receive delayed or incorrect assistance, resulting in a degraded air travel experience.

IATA has developed an international system of standardised SSR codes to capture these accommodation requests.¹ that can be included in the Passenger Name Record² and are intended to follow the passenger throughout the air travel journey. These codes are part of a standard protocol that facilitates communication between travel agency systems and airline systems and between different airlines and airports. SSRs are used to communicate passenger preferences, procedural items, or special services needed by a passenger with a disability.

SSR codes may be applied to a passenger's record by a travel agent, airline ticket agent, or frontline airline employee. While the communication protocol allows airlines to develop and use their internal codes, only IATA-approved codes should be used to provide a consistent experience to passengers.

Communication is Key

Advance communication between passengers, travel agents, and airlines regarding assistance requests is critical. It should be a collaborative process to ensure that passengers' specific needs or reasonable requests are accommodated and that they have a smooth journey.

Appropriate interaction with passengers involves actively listening, attentively addressing their specific needs and promoting open communication to allow them to express concerns or preferences related to their disability freely. Employing open-ended questions aids in collecting detailed information about the assistance or services they may need, covering areas such as mobility aids, dietary restrictions, or other special accommodations, including non-visible disabilities.

¹ IATA Resolution 700 outlines industry standards for the acceptance and carriage of passengers with disabilities requiring assistance and includes a list of all approved special service request codes relating to disability assistance and their standardized definitions.

² A Passenger Name Record (PNR), in the air transport industry, is the generic name given to records created by aircraft operators or their authorized agents for each journey booked by or on behalf of any passenger. The data are used by operators for their own commercial and operational purposes in providing air transportation services. Industry standards related to PNR creation are detailed in IATA's Passenger Services Conference Resolutions Manual and in the ATA/IATA Reservations Interline Message Procedures — Passenger (AIRIMP).



Providing information is essential in this communication process. Airlines and travel agents should clearly explain the airline's available services and assistance options. Encouraging passengers to ask questions assures them that their specific requirements are acknowledged and will be considered.

What Service Does the Passenger Need?

When addressing passengers and their specific needs, travel agents and airline personnel must refrain from attempting to diagnose passengers' medical conditions or disabilities. Instead, they should prioritise understanding and accommodating the specific services they require.

- **Ask for Information:** Encourage passengers to communicate their needs and requirements duly in advance. Ask them directly about any assistance or services they may need rather than making assumptions or trying to diagnose a condition. In situations where there is uncertainty about the access needs of a passenger, you may ask the passenger for credible verbal assurance that the passenger needs the service and how the service assists with the passenger's disability. This inquiry must not be focused on the nature of the passenger's disability. For example, if a passenger requires wheelchair assistance, you may ask: "How does the requested wheelchair service assist with your disability?"
- **Respect Privacy:** Respect passengers' privacy and confidentiality. Avoid prying into personal medical histories or making assumptions based on appearance. Information about medical conditions is private, and passengers have the right to share it voluntarily. However, if the passenger's medical condition (e.g., breathing difficulty) appears to be such that there is a reasonable doubt that a passenger can complete the flight safely, a carrier or an agent can request a medical clearance on their behalf.
- **Focus on Assistance:** Instead of diagnosing a passenger's condition, concentrate on assisting. Inquire about mobility aid requirements, dietary restrictions, or other specific needs without understanding the medical specifics. For example, if a passenger has a disability but a wheelchair service does not assist with the passenger's disability, you may propose other assistance services to support the passenger with their needs (e.g., a passenger who has difficulty walking long distances but is able to climb up and down stairs may be assisted to the gate through the use of a cart instead of a wheelchair; a passenger who is blind or low vision and needs wayfinding assistance should be provided guide assistance and not wheelchair service).

Application of SSR Codes for Accessibility Purposes

Whenever a customer with a disability travels and requires assistance provided by the airline or a contracted third party, the most appropriate SSR code(s) must be inputted into the customer's air travel record. This ensures that all parties involved in the customer's travel are aware of the customer's accommodation needs in advance and can provide that assistance seamlessly and timely.

The specific requirements for SSR codes during air travel may vary depending on the airline and the nature of the request. However, typically, the minimum information needed includes:

- **Specific SSR Code(s):** Specify the SSR code(s) corresponding to the service that best supports the passenger's accommodation needs. See Appendix A: Special Service Request Codes for Accessibility Quick Reference Guide / Job Aid for listing all IATA disability-related codes and their descriptions. As a best practice, a particular SSR code(s) should be applied to all flights in a passenger's itinerary.
- **Contact Information:** Include the passenger's contact information, such as a phone number or email, in case the airline needs to reach them.

Travel agents should always confirm with the specific airline to ensure it offers the service called for by the SSR code. Services offered may differ by airline, especially when multiple carriers are involved in an itinerary. Further, if an agent is unclear about applying a particular code, they should contact the airline directly for clarification.



As a best practice, it is recommended that assistance requests should be made no later than 48 hours before departure. Any request received after that deadline will be processed as per the booking channel opening times. However, regulatory rules may differ from country to country, and the regulations will always take precedence.

Whether during booking or later, it is important to specify to airlines' support teams the type of assistance requested and that appropriate SSR codes are used. For individuals with multiple disabilities, more than one type of assistance may be requested according to the passenger's needs.

Training

All travel agents, airline, and airport personnel who assist customers with disabilities in documenting their assistance requests should receive accurate training on the specific accommodations and services that airlines and airports provide, what the associated SSR codes are, and how they should be appropriately applied. It is essential to recognise that every reservation system differs, and how codes are added can vary depending on the airline or agency interface. All applicable employees should be trained on their company's system. The training should also focus on treating all customers with disabilities with dignity and respect and ensuring that the customer's independence and freedom of choice are always respected. Further, training should emphasise that customers with disabilities must be part of the conversation, and their input must be sought when assessing their needs and how best to accommodate them. However, passengers should not be expected to be the SSR code experts – this task remains under the remit of the travel agent or air transportation industry employee.

Case Study #1: Passenger who is not Disabled but Needs Assistance to Navigate the Airport

Background: A passenger requests wheelchair assistance (WCHR) to get through the airport but has no evident physical disability. The travel agent has reason to believe that the passenger may need wayfinding assistance rather than wheelchairs.

Challenge: Some ageing passengers without mobility devices, passengers who are travelling for the first time, do not speak the language, or may find huge and crowded airports confusing, may experience communication obstacles navigating airports and may find wheelchair services as the only solution available.

Solution: Regulations do not obligate carriers to assist a passenger when such services do not assist with the passenger's disability or if the passenger does not have a disability. In situations where there is uncertainty about the access needs of a passenger, the travel agent may ask the passenger how the service assists with the passenger's need. This inquiry should not focus on the nature of the passenger's disability. For example, the travel agent may ask the passenger: "How does the requested wheelchair service assist with your disability? In this case, the agent may communicate with the airline and propose other assistance services to support the passenger with their needs (e.g., a passenger who has difficulty walking long distances but is able to climb up and down stairs may be assisted to the gate through the use of a cart instead of a wheelchair, a passenger who is blind or low vision and needs wayfinding assistance should be provided guide assistance and not wheelchair service).

Case Study #2: Passenger who is Deaf or Blind but Does not Need a Wheelchair

Background: A traveller diagnosed as deaf may face unique challenges when navigating airports, communicating with airline and airport personnel, and ensuring their needs are met during their flight. It is



essential to communicate the traveller's needs to the airline effectively, ensuring the airline and airport staff understand their needs and any assistance they may require.

Challenge: Passengers with hearing disabilities may experience communication obstacles during their flights, such as understanding announcements, interacting with airport personnel, and receiving instructions during emergencies.

Solution: Using the dedicated SSR code, DEAF, the traveller's deaf or hearing disability will be communicated to airline and airport staff. This code communicates that assistance is required to support the passenger's needs. However, it does not indicate that the passenger needs wheelchair assistance to navigate the airport.

Implementation: In advance of the flight, airline staff receives notification of the special service assistance service requested by the passenger through the appropriate SSR code attached to the reservation. Trained personnel greet the passengers at the airport with accessible information and written communication to ensure effective interaction. They assist with the check-in process, offer visual cues during security procedures, and ensure that the passenger is informed of any pertinent information (e.g., gate changes or flight delays). Passengers can board early and are provided with instructions in an accessible format.

Conclusion: Properly communicating the diverse needs of travellers, which can include mobility issues, hearing disabilities, and other invisible impairments, is essential to communicate that specific assistance is required for the traveller. Travel agents, airline personnel, and airport staff must use a passenger's PNR to communicate the assistance passengers require.³ This ensures they can travel comfortably and with dignity, regardless of any challenges they may encounter.

Case Study #3: Passenger Who has a Mobility Disability and Requires Wheelchair Assistance

Background: A frequent traveller diagnosed with mobility issues requires a wheelchair for assistance during travel. Recognising the potential challenges involved, the travel agent proactively communicates with the airline to ensure they understand the traveller's requirements and any assistance they might require upon request.

Solution: The travel agent applies a dedicated SSR code, known as Wheelchair Assistance Required (WHCR), to the PNR reservation. This code signals to the airline the traveller's specific needs and any assistance they may require before check-in. In situations where there is uncertainty about the access needs of a passenger, you may ask the passenger for credible verbal assurance that the passenger needs the service and how the service assists with the passenger's disability. This inquiry must not be focused on the nature of the passenger's disability. For example, if a passenger requires wheelchair assistance, you may ask: "How does the requested wheelchair service assist with your disability?"

Implementation: In advance of the flight, airline staff receive notification of the SSR code attached to the reservation. Trained personnel greet the passenger at the airport, providing a wheelchair for assisted mobility and according to their disability needs. They help with check-in, guide through security, and to the boarding gate. The SSR code also notifies cabin crew members to be attentive to passengers' needs throughout the flight.

Conclusion: Supporting travellers with mobility issues can significantly improve the travel experience for both passengers and airlines. Documenting the correct code for wheelchair assistance enables effective communication between agents and airlines, facilitating a smoother journey for travellers. Please note that various wheelchair codes are available for use, each specifying the particular assistance needed, such as on-aircraft assistance and the type of wheelchairs utilised.

³ The communication protocol governing reservations procedures between a booking source (which can be an airline or a travel agent) and an airline is the A4AA/IATA Reservations Interline Message Procedures (AIRIMP). This means that the communication between airlines and travel agents is regulated by IATA standards.



Case Study #4: Passenger with Dual Disability - Blindness and Mobility

Background: An experienced traveller who is blind and has limited mobility due to injury but does not use a personal wheelchair seeks assistance. A travel agent acknowledges their requirements and determines the passenger's specific needs.

Challenge: The traveller is blind and has limited mobility, requiring thorough assistance navigating the airport and ensuring comfortable boarding and deplaning.

Solution: A combination of SSR codes (WHCR and BLND) is applied to the reservation.

Implementation: On the flight day, an automatic alert prompts airport staff to assist. Considering the visual impairment, a designated team member provides guided support through check-in, security, boarding, and deplaning. The airline ensures a wheelchair is available, as the passenger needs, and the cabin crew is briefed for assistance.

Outcome: Properly using SSR codes ensures a positive and empowering travel experience, seamlessly addressing visual impairment and mobility issues.

Conclusion: This case study exemplifies the effectiveness of SSR codes in addressing unique challenges. Combining codes for visual impairment and mobility assistance contributes to an inclusive and supportive travel environment.

Case Study #5: Application of SSR Codes for DPNA - Alzheimer's Disease

Background: A passenger on a trip to visit her family indicates she has an Alzheimer's diagnosis to a travel agent. Recognising potential challenges, a dedicated travel agent takes proactive steps to ensure a supportive experience by asking open-ended questions about the service they may need.

Challenge: Alzheimer's disease poses unique challenges, including potential confusion and disorientation, which require patient and understanding assistance throughout the journey.

Solution: After determining the passenger's required service, the travel agent assigns a specialised SSR code, Disabled Passenger with Intellectual or Developmental Disability Needing Assistance (DPNA), to the flight reservation. This code initiates personalised supportive measures for passengers encountering cognitive challenges.

Implementation: On the day of the flight, the airline staff receives notification of the SSR code. A trained staff member provides the passenger with supervised airport navigation through check-in, security, and to the boarding gate. The SSR code also notifies cabin crew members to be attentive to passengers' needs throughout the flight and upon arrival at the destination airport. In some countries, such as the United States, airlines might allow a family member to receive an escort pass to assist the guest.

Outcome: The implementation of the SSR code, DPNA (supported by a free text where needed), significantly improves the passenger's travel experience. Despite challenges, the airline staff's supportive and understanding assistance ensures the passenger feels secure and cared for throughout the journey.

Conclusion: This case study underscores the importance of using SSR codes to address specific medical conditions such as Alzheimer's. The careful implementation of supportive measures demonstrates how travel agents and airlines contribute to creating an inclusive and considerate travel environment for passengers facing cognitive challenges.





Appendix A: Special Service Request Codes for Accessibility Quick Reference Guide / Job Aid

Category:	Service requested:	Other details:	Other details or service questions:	SSR Code:	
Disability-related	None or assistance with travel	The passenger is blind or has vision loss		BLND	
		The passenger is deaf or has hearing loss		DEAF	
		Passenger with a cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disability		DPNA	
	Meet for assistance	The passenger needs assistance to reach the gate but does not need to use a wheelchair.		MAAS*	
Service animal in the cabin	Travel with a service animal.			SVAN	
	Travel with an emotional support animal.	(Subject to government regulations)		ESAN	
Mobility-related	Travel with a personal wheelchair/scooter	<i>Type of wheelchair/scooter**:</i>			
		Non-spillable, nickel-metal hydride or dry battery		WCBBD	
		Wet cell battery		WCBW	
		Manual power		WCMP	
		Lithium-ion battery		WCLB	
	<i>Ask: Is wheelchair service needed during travel? – see Wheelchair services below</i>				
	Wheelchair services	<i>For service in the airport, boarding, and/or deplaning:</i>	The passenger is completely immobile; requires a wheelchair to/from the aircraft/mobile lounge and must be carried up/down steps and to/from the cabin seat.		WCHC
			The passenger can ascend/descend steps and make their own way to/from the cabin seat; however, for the distance to/from the aircraft, i.e., across the ramp, finger dock, or to the mobile lounge, as applicable, a wheelchair is required.		WCHR
The passenger cannot ascend/descend steps but is able to make way to/from the cabin seat; requires a wheelchair for distance to/from aircraft or mobile lounge and must be carried up/down steps.			WCHS		



		Onboard the aircraft: The passenger requires the use of an onboard wheelchair provided by the airline; 48 hours' notice by the passenger is recommended but not required.	WCOB
	Travel in a cast (pair with SSR code MEDA below)	Left leg	LEGL
		Right leg	LEGR
		Both legs	LEGB
	Travel on a stretcher.	The passenger is travelling on a stretcher	STCR
Oxygen	Travel with a personal portable oxygen concentrator	The passenger is travelling with their portable oxygen concentrator.***	PPOC
	Travelling with passenger-supplied oxygen	The passenger is travelling either seated or on a stretcher, needing their own self-supplied oxygen during the flight (only to be used in conjunction with SSR code MEDA).	POXY
	Airline-supplied oxygen	The passenger is travelling either seated or on a stretcher and needs airline-supplied oxygen during the flight (only to be used in conjunction with SSR code MEDA).	AOXY
	Provision of oxygen during flight	The passenger is travelling either seated or on a stretcher and needs oxygen during the flight (only to be used in conjunction with SSR Code MEDA).	OXYG
Medical	Medical assistance or clearance	Airline medical clearance may be required. It is not to be used for passengers with disabilities or reduced mobility who only require assistance or handling and who do not require medical clearance.	MEDA

* In Europe, MAAS is not recognised at all airports and may require additional payment by the airline to the airport.

** IATA Resolution 700 does not specifically mention scooters. However, the same codes used for battery-powered wheelchairs can also be applied to battery-powered scooters. Some battery-powered mobility devices may be considered dangerous goods and should be pre-approved by the airline.

*** In some countries, an additional medical certificate may be required.