



# 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 standardize certain basic functions, such as airport and airline codes, reservations, ticketing, and passenger handling.

The purpose of this document is to help travel agents and air transportation industry employees to consistently apply the International Air Transport Association (IATA)'s disability-related Special Service Request (SSR) codes in support of the provision of safe, accessible, and dignified air travel to 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, it is critical that this request is 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.

To capture these accommodation requests, IATA has developed an international system of standardized SSR codes<sup>1</sup> that can be included in the Passenger Name Record<sup>2</sup> 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, as well as 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 does allow for airlines to develop and use their own internal codes, only IATA-approved codes should be used to provide a consistent experience to passengers.

## Communication is Key

Advance communication between passengers and travel agents/airlines regarding assistance requests is critical and 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 freely express concerns or preferences related to their disability. Employing open-ended questions aids in collecting detailed information about the assistance or services they may

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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).



need, covering areas such as mobility aids, dietary restrictions, or other special accommodations, including non-visible disabilities.

Providing information is essential in this communication process. Airlines and travel agents should clearly explain the available services and assistance options offered by the airline. 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, it is imperative that travel agents and airline personnel refrain from attempting to diagnose passengers' medical conditions or disabilities. Instead, prioritize 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 medical condition (e.g., breathing difficulty) of the passenger 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 trying to diagnose a passenger's condition, concentrate on providing assistance. Inquire about mobility aid requirements, dietary restrictions, or any other specific needs without getting into 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 his or her needs (e.g., a passenger who has difficulty walking long distances but is able to climb up and down stairs may be provided assistance 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 is traveling and requires assistance provided by the airline or by a contracted third party, the most appropriate SSR code(s) must be inputted into the customer's air travel record. This is to ensure that all parties involved in the customer's travel are aware of the customer's accommodation needs in advance and can provide that assistance in a seamless and timely manner.

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):** Clearly 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 a listing of 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 the case the airline may need to contact them.



Travel agents should always confirm with the specific airline to ensure it offers the service called for by the SSR code, as services offered may differ by airline, especially when multiple carriers are involved in an itinerary. Further, if an agent is unclear about the application of 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. For any request received after that deadline, it will be processed as per the booking channel opening times. However, regulatory rules may differ from one country to the other, 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 and on what the associated SSR codes are and how they should be appropriately applied. It is important to recognize that every reservation system is different, 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 emphasize 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 getting through the airport but has no evident physical disability and the travel agent has reason to believe that the passenger may need wayfinding assistance rather than wheelchairs.

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

**Solution:** Regulations do not obligate carriers to provide assistance to 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 his or her needs (e.g., a passenger who has difficulty walking long distances but is able to climb up and down stairs may be provided assistance 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 important to effectively communicate the traveller's needs to the airline, ensuring the airline and airport staff understand the traveller's 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 travellers 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 passenger 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 kept 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 required by passengers.<sup>3</sup> 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 a mobility issue and requires a wheelchair for assistance during travel. Recognizing the potential challenges involved, the travel agent proactively communicates with the airline to ensure they understand the traveller's requirements and upon request, any assistance they might require.

**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 specific needs of the traveller 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.



according to their disability needs. They assist with check-in, guide through security, and to the boarding gate. The SSR code also notifies cabin crew members to be attentive to the passenger's 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 there are various wheelchair codes available for use, each specifying the particular assistance needed, such as on-aircraft assistance and the type of wheelchairs utilized.

## 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 specific needs of the passenger.

**Challenge:** The traveller is blind and has limited mobility, requiring thorough assistance for 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. A designated team member provides guided support through check-in, security, boarding, and deplaning, considering the visual impairment. The airline ensures a wheelchair is available, as needed by the passenger, and cabin crew is briefed for assistance.

**Outcome:** The proper use of SSR codes ensures a positive and empowering travel experience, addressing both visual impairment and mobility issues seamlessly.

**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. Recognizing potential challenges, a dedicated travel agent takes proactive steps to ensure a supportive experience by asking open ended questions on the service they may need.

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

**Solution:** After determining the service the passenger requires, the travel agent assigns a specialized SSR code, Disabled Passenger with Intellectual or Developmental Disability Needing Assistance (DPNA), to the flight reservation. This code initiates personalized 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 the passenger's 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 supportive and understanding assistance provided by airline staff 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 disease. 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:	
<b>Disability-related</b>	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 the use of a wheelchair.		MAAS*	
<b>Service animal in cabin</b>	Travel with a service animal			<b>SVAN</b>	
	Travel with an emotional support animal	(Subject to government regulations)		ESAN	
<b>Mobility-related</b>	Travel with a personal wheelchair/scooter	<i>Type of wheelchair/scooter**:</i>			
		Non-spillable, nickel-metal hydride or dry battery		WCBD	
		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 wheelchair to/from aircraft/mobile lounge and must be carried up/down steps and to/from cabin seat.		WCHC
			The passenger can ascend/descend steps and make own way to/from cabin seat; requires wheelchair for distance to/from aircraft, i.e., across ramp, finger dock or to mobile lounge as applicable.		WCHR
			The passenger cannot ascend/descend steps but is able to make way to/from cabin seat; requires wheelchair for distance to/from aircraft or mobile lounge and must be carried up/down steps.		WCHS
		Onboard the aircraft: The passenger requires 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 traveling on a stretcher		STCR		
<b>Oxygen</b>	Travel with a personal portable oxygen concentrator	The passenger is traveling with their own personal portable oxygen concentrator.***		PPOC	
	Traveling with passenger-supplied oxygen	The passenger is traveling 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 traveling either seated or on a stretcher, needing 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	
<b>Medical</b>	Medical assistance or clearance	Airline medical clearance may be required. Not to be used for passengers with disabilities or reduced mobility who only require assistance or handling, and who do not require a medical clearance.		MEDA	

\* In Europe, MAAS is not recognized 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 for 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.