Overview

Why was this solution created? What problem is it solving?

The unexpected event of COVID-19 has led to complex problems, including government-imposed travel restrictions. The current automated industry solution for voluntary changes and refunds on tickets was not set up to handle this type of emergency for existing tickets.

The industry needed an automated solution to waive fees on these tickets during this time and provide greater flexibility for the traveling public. It is incredibly time-consuming for each airline and agency to manually process changes to tickets. Each airline was trying to come up with their own solution and nothing was working the same way across all channels. ATPCO saw this happening and, as a service organization to the industry, created this solution.

Timing

When is the solution being implemented?

The industry adoption date for the subscribers is scheduled for 7 June. Each airline can begin prebuilding data on 17 May, but cannot file and distribute the data until 7 June.

How long do I need to leave my emergency conditions in effect?

The General Rule Index referencing the more lenient waiver tariff and rules will need to remain as long as the waiver is required. Once the General Rule Index is removed, normal processing will occur. For example, if you need your emergency policies to apply to itinerary change and refund requests made through 31 December 2020, then the General Rule Index must be in place until then.

What will happen once the COVID-19 emergency is over?

ATPCO will notify the industry ahead of time and define a timeframe of when the General Rule Index data will be removed for Categories 31 and 33.

Can I remove or end my emergency policy at any time before the ATPCO date (when it is determined)?

Yes, you can remove it any time before the ATPCO date.

To remove the emergency policy, delete the Category 31 and 33 references from the General Rule Index. You can remove them yourself or request ATPCO Customer Service to remove the reference in the General Rule Index (for free). You can cancel your emergency policy data in the general rule tariffs yourself or you can leave the data and not cancel it, in case you want to use this data again in the future. Make sure that you have Category 31 and 33 provisions or an Alternate General Rule in your fare rule during and after the emergency so that subscribers will have those provisions to apply when the emergency policy is removed; otherwise, they will apply what was in effect at the time the ticket was purchased.

Best Practices

Do I need to align my ATPCO Voluntary Changes and Refunds data with what is on my website?

Yes. You need to ensure that your ATPCO data reflects what is on your airline website. This must be timely because any inconsistency can cause cost through disputes between stakeholders (airline to airline, or airline to agency).

Is it possible to indicate that the reissue is based on specific new travel dates?

For voluntary changes, new travel date requirements would normally be expressed in the Category 31 Override Date Table (994). ATPCO recommends you verify with your preferred subscriber to ensure they can process this data correctly, because not every system may.

Can I file my Category 31 and 33 data without first building my General Rule Index?

Yes. Be sure to keep a record of your tariff and rules to build the General Rule Index later.

Can I pre-build my General Rule Index before the industry adoption and file it?

You can pre-build your General Rule Index starting 17 May 2020, but you must not release or file the data until 7 June 2020.

Can I create my General Rule Index before I create my Category 31 and 33 data?

Edits require that you create at least one sequence in each category before being able to list that tariff and rule in the General Rule Index.

Can I specify agency codes or GDSs in my Qualifying (IF) Category 15?

Not if you want the data to be processed by all subscribers. You can only specify geographical locations in a Qualifying Category 15 from Category 31/33 for this emergency policy. Some subscribers will not process the data if you do not follow the recommended practices in the coding guidelines.

Do I need to update my existing Category 31 and 33 General Rules or create new General Rules?

ATPCO recommends you leave your existing Category 31 and 33 general rule provisions that you have coded as Alternate General Rules as they are (such as IPRG Rule 0031). Then create new General Rules for your emergency policies and reference them in the General Rule Index. That way, when the emergency is over, the provisions you had in place before will apply without having to recreate or modify them.

Can I qualify that the change or refund can only take place based on past dates when the previous ticket was issued or when travel was originally scheduled to depart?

Yes, you can only specify past dates in the Override Date Table (994) within the Qualifying (IF) Category 14. This capability is only provided when you have a Main Category 31/33 with a Qualifying Category 14. You will need to specify additional data within your Category 14 in order to use the Override Date Table, ATPCO suggests indicating a future Return Travel Commence date (such as on/before 31DEC21) in the Category 14 main data, and then use historical ticket and or travel dates in the Category 14 Override Date 994 Table.

I want to refund to a transportation credit rather than cash. How can I do that?

It is each individual airline's responsibility to check with their legal counsel on company policy and any legal and regulatory environment governing this decision, and an airline decision for how to treat voluntary ticket changes and refunds. IATA can assist with advice on local regulations governing refunds to voucher or to transportation credit instead of cash. ATPCO industry standards for pricing and retailing automation allow for these options based on your decision. Applicable values within Voluntary Refunds (Category 33) for alternatives to cash refunds include refund to Electronic Miscellaneous Document (EMD), voucher, or scrip (a more generic term for individual airline form of credit). We are happy to help with your use of automation to get to the result that you need.

Can I amend my existing fare rules to include my emergency policy rather than introduce general rules?

Rule conditions that an airline files today apply to original tickets issued today and in the future, but do not address tickets issued previously. General Rule Category 31 or 33 data will apply to previously issued tickets based on the date the change or refund is requested. When a Category 31 or 33 is listed in the General Rules Index, the General Rule Category 16 is considered a part of the emergency policy and will apply to previously issued tickets based on the date the change or refund is requested.

If I already specify Penalties (Category 16) in a General Rule, can I amend it to include my emergency policy or do I need to create a new Category 16 General Rule?

Current Category 16 General Rules should be removed from Record 0 and instead specified as an Alternate General Rule within the Fare Rule. This will keep the data aligned to the Fare Rule Categories 31 and 33. New Category 16 General Rules should be created to include the emergency policy and specified in the General Rule Index to align with the Category 31 and 33 emergency policy. ATPCO's new query option will allow you to easily reference an Alternate General Rule in an existing Fare Rule.

What will happen if data in the General Rule provisions fails to match the itinerary?

If the itinerary fails to match the emergency Category 31 or 33 string of the data associated to the General Rule referenced in the General Rule Index, then processing goes back to the Fare Rule or Alternate General Rule (as the standard process outlined in the data application) for Category 16, 31 and 33.

Will the agents see the text corresponding to standard Category31 or to emergency policy?

When the ticket is being sold, the non-emergency fare rules in effect on ticket issue date will be displayed. When pricing a voluntary change or refund transaction, the text corresponding to the emergency data will be displayed.

Will a waiver code be necessary when using the ATPCO solution?

This solution is for automated processing. When a voluntary change or refund is automated based on ATPCO Category 31 or 33 data, a waiver code will not be generated on new tickets (for exchanges) or in refund reporting (for refunds). Automated changes and refunds (processed via Categories 31 and 33) are considered "guaranteed" since they are purely driven by the airline's automated data and are not manipulated by the travel agent. Therefore, a waiver code is not imposed. Airlines should keep waiver codes for manual transactions only.

Can airlines use the new general rule only for Category 16 and 31 and not include Category 33?

Yes, you don't have to use both Categories 31 and 33. You can use only Category 31 or 33.

If I only use Category 16 today, what do I need to do to apply this emergency policy?

You will need to code a generic lenient General Rule for Category 16 and either Category 31 or 33, then list them in the General Rule Index. Categories 31 and 33 were not allowed in the General Rule Index before; therefore, this solution uses the presence of Category 31 or 33 in the General Rule Index to signify this is an emergency policy for Categories16, 31, and 33, and that information will be used when the reissue or refund request is made.

Resources

- Join the industry spotlight webinar on 2 June featuring emergency flexibility solution insights from Amadeus, Sabre, and Travelport. Register today.
- For a broader overview of the solution, watch the 30 April webinar recording.
- For a technical refresher, see the recording of a technical review from the Learning Solutions team.
- Refer to this guidelines document as a quick reference (updated as needed).
- Hear from one of our product experts in a blog post.
- When in doubt, reach out to ATPCO's Customer Service team.