

Becoming an Air Traffic Controller in the Middle East

Who issues ATC licences in Middle East?

In the Middle East, air traffic controller licences are issued by national civil aviation authorities in each individual country, each state is responsible for approving training, assessing competence, and issuing licences with training and medical standards set by the **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** regulations and national requirements.

Licensing standards are based on **ICAO Annex 1 – Personnel Licensing**, but each country applies its own national regulations.

Example Licensing Authorities in the Region

Country	Licensing Authority (Regulator)	Primary Employer (ANSP)
UAE	General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA)	GANS dans GAL
Saudi Arabia	General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA)	SANS (Saudi Air Navigation Services)
Jordan	Jordan: Civil Aviation Regulatory Commission (CARC)	The Air Navigation Services (ANS) Division
Oman	Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)	Oman ANS
Bahrain	Ministry of Transportation & Telecom (MTT)	Bahrain ANS
Qatar	Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA)	QCAA ANS

Getting selected as an air traffic controller (Middle East)

To become an air traffic controller in the Middle East, you must pass a **competitive selection process run at national level**. This process is managed by the **air navigation service provider or government aviation authority** in the country where you apply, and selection requirements can vary between states.

Selection typically includes:

- Cognitive and aptitude testing
- English language assessment in accordance (ICAO language standards)
- Interviews or structured assessment centre exercises
- Medical examination
- Security and background checks under national regulations.

Successful completion of the selection process allows candidates to begin air traffic control training but does not yet result in the issuance of an air traffic controller licence.

Medical requirements

In the Middle East, air traffic controllers must meet specific aviation medical standards before they begin training and to maintain their license. Specifically within GCC countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and Kuwait are adhering to ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) standards, and the requirement is that they must hold a Class 3 aviation medical certificate issued by the international civil aviation authority. This certificate demonstrates that the candidate meets basic health requirements for air traffic duties. Each country's civil aviation authority requires applicants to pass an **aviation medical examination** before training begins.

This medical check looks at areas such as:

- Vision (including colour perception)
- Hearing assessment
- Cardiovascular health
- Neurological evaluation
- Psychological suitability
- General physical fitness

The medical certificate is issued by an approved aviation medical examiner or centre and must be renewed regularly to remain valid throughout training and employment.

Air traffic controllers in the Middle East must meet specific aviation medical standards before they begin training and throughout their careers. Each country's civil aviation authority sets and enforces these standards, and they are generally aligned with international safety practices as defined by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Medical fitness ensures controllers are physically and mentally capable of performing safety-critical duties in busy environments.

Education and language skills (Middle East)

Applicants are generally required to have completed secondary education, with a strong background in mathematics and science preferred. English is the operational language of air traffic control, so candidates must demonstrate a high level of spoken and written English, as required by national aviation authorities. Education and language requirements are set at the national level and aligned with standards from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Additional academic qualifications may be required depending on the country or employer.

Education and Language Requirements

Minimum requirements include:

- Completion of secondary education
- Strong background in mathematics and science (preferred)
- High level of spoken and written English

English proficiency is mandatory because English is the operational language of international aviation.

In some Middle Eastern countries (such as UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan), a high school diploma may be sufficient for entry into training. However, exact academic requirements depend on the employing authority.

Training to become an air traffic controller

Training to become an air traffic controller in the Middle East follows a similar overall structure across countries, even though it is delivered under national systems. After passing selection, trainees complete initial theoretical training, followed by simulator-based instruction and on-the-job training at an operational unit. Training is provided by organisations approved by the national aviation authority and is aligned with standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization. Successful completion of all training phases and examinations is required before a controller can be licensed and allowed to work independently.

Types of ATC Ratings

In the Middle East, air traffic controllers are licensed with specific ratings that define the type of air traffic control service they are authorized to provide. These ratings are based on standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization and applied through national regulations. Common ratings include aerodrome control (tower control at airports), approach control (managing aircraft arriving and departing within terminal airspace), and area control (en-route control of aircraft cruising between airports). Controllers are trained and licensed for one or more ratings, depending on operational needs, and ratings are usually specific to a particular unit or environment.

How long does training take?

Once accepted, you begin formal training at a dedicated academy like the Sheikh Zayed Air Navigation Centre (UAE) or the SANS Academy (Saudi Arabia).

- Theory (3–6 months): You'll study aviation law, meteorology, navigation, and aircraft characteristics.
- Simulation (6–12 months): You will spend hundreds of hours in 2D and 3D simulators, practicing everything from routine landings to "black swan" emergency events.

Age, Nationality and posting

Topic	Middle East practice
Minimum age	Commonly 18 - 24 years old
Maximum age	Employer-specific, may not apply
Nationality	Depends on country and employer
Right to work	Required for the employing state
Posting after training	Based on operational needs or specific unit recruitment

GCAA Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR-ATCO) - UAE

GACAR Part 64 (Air Traffic Services Personnel) - Saudi Arabia

QCAR 007 Air Traffic Controller Licensing - Qatar

ICAO Annex 1 (Personnel Licensing)

- <https://www.bazl.admin.ch/en/annexes-to-the-convention-on-international-civil-aviation-icao>
- <https://store.icao.int/en/annexes/annex-1>
- <https://www.caa.gov.qa/sites/default/files/2021-10/Air%20Traffic%20Controller%20Licensing%20%281%29.pdf>
- <https://www.gcaa.gov.ae/en/epublication/EPublications/Civil%20Aviation%20Regulations%20%28CARs%29/CAR%20II%20-%20LICENSING%20AND%20TRAINING%20ORGANISATION%20REGULATIONS/CAR%20ATCO%20-%20AIR%20TRAFFIC%20CONTROLLER%20LICENSING%20AND%20ATC%20TRAINING%20ORGANIZATIONS%20-%20ISSUE%2001.pdf>
- <https://www.gcaa.gov.ae/en/eservices/renewal-of-medical-certificate/178>
- <https://www.icao.int/personnel-licensing-faq>
- [https://www.caa.gov.qa/sites/default/files/2021-10/Air%20Traffic%20Controller%20Licensing%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.caa.gov.qa/sites/default/files/2021-10/Air%20Traffic%20Controller%20Licensing%20(1).pdf)

Step	UAE (GCAA)	Saudi (GACA)	Oman (CAA)	Qatar (QCAA)	Egypt (CAA)
Entry age	18–24 years (General Civil Aviation Authority)	Defined by ANSP	18+ years (Civil Aviation Authority)	Defined by regulator (Civil Aviation Authority)	Depends on programme (EAA Egypt)
Education	High school / degree (General Civil Aviation Authority)	High school / higher	Entry requirements as per CAA rules (Civil Aviation Authority)	National regime (Civil Aviation Authority)	Diploma/degree (EAA Egypt)
Medical	Required (Class III)	Required	Required (Civil Aviation Authority)	Required (Civil Aviation Authority)	Required (EAA Egypt)
English	IELTS / equivalent (General Civil Aviation Authority)	English proficiency	English proficiency (Civil Aviation Authority)	English proficiency (Civil Aviation Authority)	English assessment (EAA Egypt)
Licence issuer	GCAA	GACA	CAA Oman	CAA Qatar	National CAA
Training type	Theory + practical + OJT (General Civil Aviation Authority)	Theory + practical + OJT (GACA)	Theory + practical + OJT (Civil Aviation Authority)	Theory + practical + OJT (Civil Aviation Authority)	College / approved courses (EAA Egypt)