



# FIVE ONE REVIEW

**Local startups**

growing to the next level!

**INTERVIEW WITH  
RANOO HIWA**

*Founder of Bina app*

*Rise in investment  
into high-growth startups*

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# Founders' Note

Welcome back to the Five One Labs magazine! We are so pleased to be sharing with you all of our organization's updates since the start of 2021.

In this second issue, you will read more about our expanded programming - which we have adapted to the growing entrepreneurial ecosystem in Iraq and the evolving needs of its startups. You will hear about the the work we are doing to support later-stage entrepreneurs in the Iraqi ecosystem through our Kurdish- and Arabic-language Accelerator Services Program; receive an update about our Five One Invest initiative; and see how we have responded to the impact of COVID-19 through our Growth Fund Project.

As always, you will have the opportunity to meet two of our wonderful founders - Ranoo, who through her startup, Bina, is tackling employment and quality issues in the construction sector, and Jihad, a recent Youth Incubator alumnus who is addressing the tricky issue of landlord and tenant communication. If you are interested in reading more founder stories and don't want to wait until our next issue, check out our regular "Meet the Founder" series [on our blog](#) or take a look at [our Instagram page](#).

We are working on a number of exciting things over the coming months - a pilot program partnership with Mosul Space, a special program to support refugee camp-based entrepreneurs, a Kurdish-language summer program, a business registration initiative, and more. You will hear about all of these updates in our next issue!

**Alice Bosley and Patricia Letayf**  
**Co-Founders**  
**Five One Labs**

# Incubating Business Ideas From Across Iraq

Supporting innovative entrepreneurs has always been at the center of what Five One Labs does. Running two simultaneous incubators during 2020 allowed us to better serve our mission.

After the challenging year of 2020, our community of young entrepreneurs saw that Iraq was even more in need of tech-based solutions to tackle both new and existing challenges in their society. Our recent Tech Incubator in Sulaimani brought together a cohort of diverse entrepreneurs from around the country, each with his or her own vision for what their society could look like. The incubator, which was run fully online, included 16 tech-enabled startups in different fields and sectors, ranging from web solutions for contractors to easy-to-use online translation services, among others.



The 23 entrepreneurs enrolled in the incubator graduated with their minimum viable products ready to be put in front of customers. Startups in the program included **Chera**, an online cosmetics store selling natural products; **Rawezhy to**, a legal consultancy platform; and **Hello Healthify**, a healthcare service management platform. Five One Labs partnered with the International Organization for Migration to provide up to \$200,000 total in seed funding to the startups, which will be awarded later in June.

**"During the three months [of the incubator], I was encouraged by the best trainers to work really hard on my project."**

*Gashaw - Founder of Hello Healthify*



**"Thanks to the program, the process of making my app got a lot easier. Any obstacles I had, I got through them with the program and Five One Labs trainers. Finding Five One Labs was just the place I was looking for to bring my idea to the real world!"**

*Shvan - Founder of My Review*



In Erbil, our Startup Support team launched a new initiative, the Youth Incubator, which targeted young innovators up to 26 years old from across the Kurdistan Region. Supported by UNICEF, our Youth Incubator worked with a cohort of 18 startup founders.

Businesses included **Freemium**, a communication and management app for landlords and tenants (read more about the founder below); **Reborn with Gluten-Free**, a service that provides gluten-free products to gluten-sensitive people and helps them live a healthier life; **Paryas BookStore**, a platform that brings libraries together and makes finding books easier for their users; and **IraqTM eSport**, an e-sport platform (mobile app). Five One Labs, with the support of UNICEF, awarded a total of \$30,000 in seed funding to six startups in the program.

Having entrepreneurs constantly going through our yearly cohorts is what makes Five One Labs' entrepreneurial community a unique point to start from. Our ever-evolving community includes a great number of business people with years of experience and expertise and mentors that can guide our participants through their first steps in developing their businesses. The positive feedback our team receives from our participants is what our organization takes pride in!



**Donate today to help us  
support more entrepreneurs!**  
[fiveonelabs.org/donate](https://fiveonelabs.org/donate)

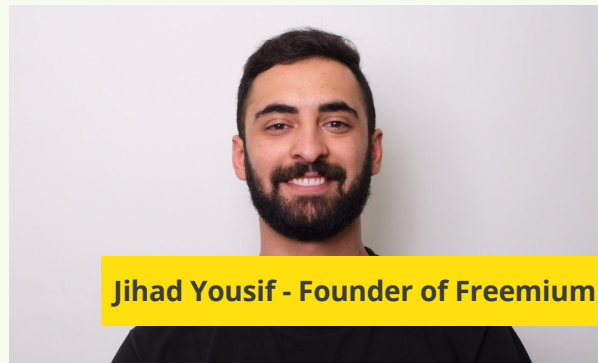
# Meet Jihad: Digitizing Landlord and Tenant Communication

"Five One Labs gave me guidance and training, and taught me the skills that I need to develop myself and my startup to a level where I myself can pitch my business to investors and other people!"

Jihad once noticed that every time he visits his friend's apartment in Erbil, he has to go through a long process of checks and approvals to be allowed entry. As he started exploring this issue, he realized that this was only one of many challenges facing individuals living in residential apartment areas.

With these challenges in mind, Jihad developed the idea for Freemium, an app that tackles the problems apartment tenants and managers face, and joined the Youth Incubator in 2020 to launch his business.

"Freemium adds the premium missing touch for apartment tenants and management. By developing the first communication mobile application and management system in Iraq, we facilitate communication between tenants and their management, and link them to service providers, whether it's an apartment or a gated community."



His vision for Freemium is to grow out of the local community in Erbil and expand to the rest of Iraq. When asked what advice he would provide future entrepreneurs, he said: "Be logical; do solid market research and conduct many interviews with people; listen carefully to any feedback that you receive; and no matter how hard a situation might seem, always look for solutions. Never give up on any opportunity!"

Regarding his experience after participating in Five One Labs' Youth Incubator, he mentioned: "The incubator made us focus, work hard on the ideas that we had, gave us a community of amazing trainers and mentors, integrated advanced training and motivated us by introducing us to other entrepreneurs who went down the same path as ours. Five One helped us develop prototypes, and converting our idea into a working prototype was a huge step!"



# Growth Funding Project: Rebounding After COVID-19

Many small and medium businesses across the Middle East faced substantial challenges through the pandemic, be it a reduction in customer demand or difficulties in covering staff costs, among others. In response to these difficulties, Five One Labs launched the **Growth Funding Project (GFP)** to provide seed funding and business advisory support to early- and later-stage startups impacted by the pandemic and enable them to get back on their feet and grow their businesses after the challenging year.

**“The startup landscape in Iraq is ripe with opportunity, as evident through the over one thousand applicants for the Growth Fund,”** said Shwan Qaradaghi, Head of Expansion at Five One Labs. “We are excited to support these 11 startups who have remained resilient in the face of the challenges presented by COVID-19, and through their success we hope to continue to grow the evolving ecosystem of startups across the region.”

The finalists went through a due diligence process with Five One Labs and a panel of the organization's entrepreneurship experts selected the recipients based on the following criteria: value proposition, traction, growth plans, financial management and team.

Five One Labs received over **1,300 applications** for the Growth Funding Project. From this competitive set, 11 startups operating in Erbil, Sulaimani, Baghdad, Basra and other cities were selected to receive a total of \$150,000 in grant funding provided by German development agency GIZ. Of the 11 companies, **five are led by women entrepreneurs.**



**Basima Abdulrahman**, a Growth Fund Project grant recipient and the founder of green building consulting company **KESK**

"COVID-19 was a mass extinction event for startups that are already facing fundamental challenges in Iraq...The unexpected arrival of the pandemic has resulted in a major slump in consumer demand. Lack of funding is one of the key reasons why startups fail. Five One Labs' GFP funding will help us achieve key milestones to acquire customers and drive sales and revenues."



## Growing Investments in Iraqi Startups

Since this time last year, there has been an acceleration in the pace of investments in Iraqi startups, both from regional and local investors. In addition to a number of investments led by the Iraqi Angels Network, e-commerce platform Orisdi raised a **six-figure bridge round**; AISaree3 Group, which includes food-delivery and last-mile delivery arms, closed a **seven-figure bridge round**; and e-commerce platform Miswag closed a second seed round, bringing the total amount of capital raised by the company to over \$1 million.

As both regional investor interest and the number of startups seeking funding grows, Five One Invest has brought together investors and entrepreneurs through monthly Speakers Series to

share information on the process behind specific investment deals in Iraq; provide insights to entrepreneurs raising capital for the first time; and answer questions relating to the legal process that are unique to Iraq's complex regulatory environment.

In the past **six months** we dove into the topics of angel investment and venture capital with MedAngels Network Manager Azza Yehia and venture capitalist Riley Rodgers; hosted seasoned investor Rawaz Rauf for a Kurdish-language discussion about the mindsets and motivations of angel investors; and took deep dives into investments into Orisdi and superapp Lezzoo with the investors and founders involved in the deals.



# Our Mentors

*Insights from our community of volunteer experts*

I always feel happy when I interact with young entrepreneurs, and thanks to Five One Labs for providing such an opportunity. Such programs are more important than monetary support, as they increase the odds of success and shorten the time and cost of trial and error approach of learning for the startups, which is something that money alone can't do.

The passion and enthusiasm I felt from the entrepreneur I mentored in the Tech Incubator said everything about the great job that Five One Labs is doing in helping startups in Iraq.



**Hussain Albayati**

**Country Manager of OpenSooq**  
Baghdad, Iraq

Having mentored for Google, PwC and the NHS for many years, it was incredibly rewarding to be able to pass on my experience to Five One Labs. I had the honor to mentor Tech Incubator entrepreneur Eman Ezzet, founder and CEO of Med Guide and one of the most dedicated, ambitious and determined founders I have met.

**Sharlene Lopez**

**CEO of Eye catcher**  
London, UK



# Launching Acceleration Services For Later Stage Businesses

**The entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Middle East is flourishing**, and 2020 has seen a record rise in investments into high growth startups - over \$1 billion over the course of the year. While the Iraqi ecosystem is thriving, it is clear that challenges for later-stage startups remain and that obstacles to growth have made it much harder for great startups to attract investment, scale, and succeed on a local and regional level.

In light of these dynamics and in an effort to expand its offerings to later stage businesses, in April Five One Labs launched its debut **“Acceleration Services”** a program that provides later-stage startups across Iraq with practical consulting and support services to supercharge their growth and professionalize their operations.



Supported by USAID, the Acceleration Services programs aims to make growth attainable through the provision of highly targeted, professional consulting in marketing and sales, team building and growth, financial management, and investment readiness. The program, which is being run fully online, is being offered in both Arabic and Kurdish to better serve founders across the country. Over the span of four months, the Five One Labs team and specialized business consultants and international experts are providing startups with six hours of advanced workshops each month, a monthly closed-door talk with an expert in the field, four hours of targeted one-on-one consulting from local partner agencies, and additional bespoke legal, technological, and business consulting services.

To make this program possible, Five One Labs partnered with local firms and agencies to provide high quality consultancy that fits the Iraqi market. Program partners include Brick Lane and Grei Agency for marketing, EasyBooks for financial management, Erbil ManPower for HR and team management, and Hawre Surchi Company for legal support. Al Hadeel Al Hasan Law is additionally providing legal services pro bono to the startups.

# Bina: Creating Opportunities in the Construction Sector

Ranoo Hiwa launched Bina App in Five One Labs' 2019 Tech Incubator. While working as an engineer in the construction field, Ranoo realized how difficult the recruitment process in the sector could be, so she developed the idea for an application that would make this process easier for users and give workers and teams a platform to find new construction projects.

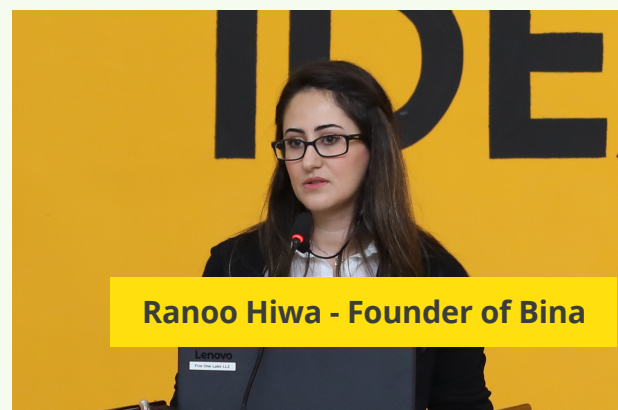
Bina App's mission is to connect skilled workers and companies through a digital platform that is easy to use and to create employment opportunities in Iraq.



Bina provides faster and easier means for people to get work in the construction industry in Iraq. It gives greater insight into the opportunities for work that are available and improves the link between the workers and businesses. **Bina App** enables skilled workers, engineers and construction firms alike to find the required skills and links them together through the digital platform. **This not only provides opportunities but also increases the quality of construction work through a system of customer feedback and ratings.**

Since Bina launched in the fall of 2020, professionals across Kurdistan who are working in the construction field are joining Bina daily. More than 2,000 professionals are enrolled and the number is increasing daily. As of **February 2021**, Bina has created over 190 job opportunities for their professionals, with more than 7,000 users and 250 services.

"If you want to make improvements in your country and you see a problem and you wish it to be solved, you should start solving it by yourself. There is nothing more exciting than making improvements in the field that you love."



Bina is still under development and improvement to make it easier for its users that will be released later in 2021 to help professionals in the construction field to get connected to their customers easily.

# Five One Labs would like to thank our donors and supporters



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