



## **International Mountain Explorers Connection**

# **Annual Report**

*"Supporting Responsible Mountain Trekking"*



**2024**

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD

PROGRAMMES & PROJECTS

MONITORING & REPORTING

PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDRAISING

FINANCE REPORT



*Kilimanjaro*



# FOREWORD

Dear Friends, Partners, and Supporters,

2024 was a year of action, innovation, and perseverance for the International Mountain Explorers Connection (IMEC) and the Kilimanjaro Responsible Trekking Organisation (KRTO). Amid both challenges and achievements, our mission to promote ethical trekking, environmental sustainability, and porter welfare continued to gain momentum.

With unwavering support from our partners, donors, and volunteers, IMEC is fostering fair labour practices, responsible tourism, and environmental conservation.

Key highlights include:

- Implementation of the Climber Fee Programme, securing long-term financial sustainability.
- Expanding education and training programs for porters, ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions.
- Strengthening compliance frameworks to enhance ethical trekking standards.
- Deepening environmental stewardship initiatives through the Kilimanjaro Environmental Care Awareness program (KECA).
- Encouraging collective responsibility among trekking companies, tour operators, and stakeholders.
- Monitoring over 3,000 climbs and ensured that thousands of porters, guides, and cooks were treated with dignity, fairness, and respect.
- Review of IMEC's Strategic Plan, establishing a roadmap for growth and impact.
- Strengthen Institutional Partnerships, including outreach to government, corporate sponsors, and regulatory bodies.

While progress has been strong, we recognize ongoing challenges in integrating sustainable funding models, ethical compliance within trekking operations. However, through open dialogue, structured financial models, and collaboration, IMEC and KRTO remain committed to refining processes, ensuring improved clarity, efficiency, and accessibility for partners and stakeholders.

As adventure tourism continues to evolve, our collective responsibility is to protect landscapes, empower communities, and set ethical standards for trekking worldwide. Through collaboration and shared commitment, we will climb higher—not just in altitude, but in impact.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all who have championed ethical trekking, porter welfare, and environmental conservation. Your contributions, insights, and dedication fuel this mission and shape the future of responsible tourism.

*Melissa Foley & Saskia de Rover*

*Co-Chairs, International Mountain Explorers Connection*



**International Mountain  
Explorers Connection**

# PROGRAMMES & PROJECTS

## Tanzania

The Kilimanjaro Responsible Trekking Organisation (KRTO) is a Tanzanian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) dedicated to promoting ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible trekking on Mt. Kilimanjaro. As one of the world's most iconic trekking destinations, Kilimanjaro draws thousands of adventurers each year. However, behind the success of these expeditions are the porters and mountain crew members who enable the journey. KRTO stands as an advocate for their fair treatment, economic empowerment, and environmental stewardship, ensuring that trekking benefits not just climbers, but the local communities and ecosystems.

### Key Initiatives & Impact

KRTO's core initiatives ensure fair treatment, financial stability, and environmental stewardship, securing a sustainable future for Kilimanjaro's trekking industry:

- **Kilimanjaro Porters Assistance Project (KPAP)**  
Audits trekking companies for fair labour compliance, provides guidance, and supplies porters with essential gear.
- **Kilimanjaro Environmental Care Awareness program (KECA)**  
Promotes waste management, sustainable trekking, and conservation efforts with local communities.
- **Community Empowerment and Development program (CED)**  
Economic Empowerment & Financial Literacy. Offers training and microfinance support, fostering porter-led business cooperatives.



### Looking Ahead: Challenges & Priorities

KRTO has made significant progress in promoting ethical trekking, but challenges remain. These include budget constraints and growing tourism pressures, requiring stronger environmental and ethical safeguards. Key priorities for the coming year include:

- Expanding porter training and financial literacy programs to ensure economic stability.
- Strengthening partnerships with government entities and trekking operators.
- Enhancing conservation efforts, reducing trekking-related environmental impact.
- Improving compliance frameworks to maintain ethical standards.

# Nepal & Peru

## Key Initiatives & Impact

In 2024, IMEC began the process of reestablishing connections in Nepal and Peru to expand its work in the promotion of responsible trekking practices to these regions.

Building on our legacy of ethical and sustainable tourism practices, and plans are being laid to partner with local organizations and stakeholders to launch targeted programs focused on porter welfare, guide training, and environmental stewardship in the Everest, Annapurna, and Machu Picchu regions.

## Looking Ahead: Challenges & Priorities

Despite promising engagement, challenges remain. Systemic issues related to informal labour practices, lack of standardized regulation, and environmental degradation continue to affect both regions.

However, strong local partnerships and increasing awareness among trekking companies and tourists will provide a solid foundation for long-term change.

Looking ahead, IMEC aims to:

- Expand efforts to reach more trekking operators in both regions
- Strengthen local advocacy for porter rights and workplace protections
- Develop and scale up environmental campaigns to preserve the integrity of natural trekking corridors

Through collaboration, education, and persistent advocacy, IMEC is committed to fostering a more ethical and sustainable trekking industry in Nepal and Peru—just as we have done on Mt. Kilimanjaro.



**Nepal, Himalaya**



**Peru**

# HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

## Noah , Porter, Age 39 , Tanzania

After participating in an alternative income generating project training, Noah was inspired to take immediate action. He launched three small-scale businesses: goat rearing, a local barber shop, and a motorcycle transport service.

Through his goat-rearing initiative, Noah breeds and sells young goats to local farmers—a venture that provides quick and consistent income. His barber shop and motorcycle transport services offer additional revenue streams, helping to diversify and stabilize his household income.

*"The class was powerful and eye-opening," Noah shared. "I encourage others to join whenever new training opportunities are announced."*

Noah's story highlights the transformative impact of entrepreneurial education and the importance of providing practical tools for economic empowerment.



## International Mountain Explorers Connection

## Ritha, Porter, Age 45, Tanzania

Ritha, a 45-year-old resident of Marangu, joined the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) two years ago as a family member of a porter already participating in the group. Encouraged by a friend and impressed by the group's efficiency and sound management practices, she decided to become a member.

Her primary goal was to establish a savings habit. Since joining, Ritha has realized multiple benefits. She successfully saved enough to build a modern toilet for her household—a significant improvement in her family's quality of life. She also accessed soft loans at a low, agreed-upon interest rate, which she repaid on time. These loans allowed her to cover important expenses, such as school fees for her children.

In addition to meeting urgent financial needs, Ritha has continued saving for future projects. She appreciates not only the financial flexibility the VSLA provides but also the opportunity to earn dividends at the end of each cycle.

# MONITORING & REPORTING

## Monitoring

IMEC consistently tracks the effectiveness of its programs and verifies adherence to fair labour practices. IMEC strict internal monitoring standards include:

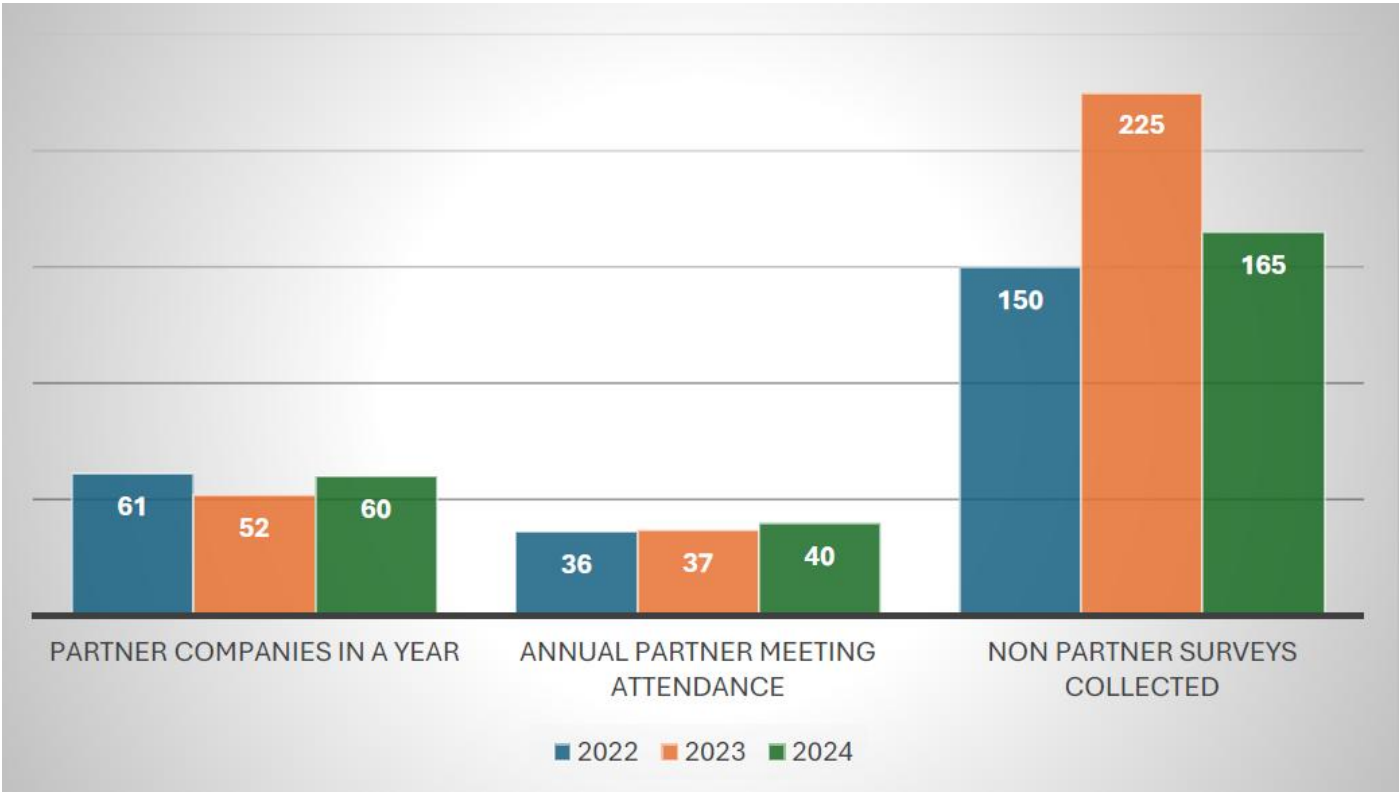
- Conducting field evaluations of Partner Companies
- Administering impact surveys with key stakeholders
- Transparent financial reporting through independent third-party audits

### Partner for Responsible Travel Program

The success IMEC is deeply rooted in the commitment and engagement of its partner companies. Each year, these companies play a central role in upholding ethical treatment of mountain crew and promoting sustainable trekking practices.

From 2022 to 2024, between **52 and 61** companies participated in our programs annually, with steady increases in partner engagement reflected in the attendance at annual partner meetings, rising from **36** in 2022 to **64 representatives from 40 partner companies** in 2024. These meetings serve as critical touchpoints for knowledge sharing, policy updates, and collaborative progress.

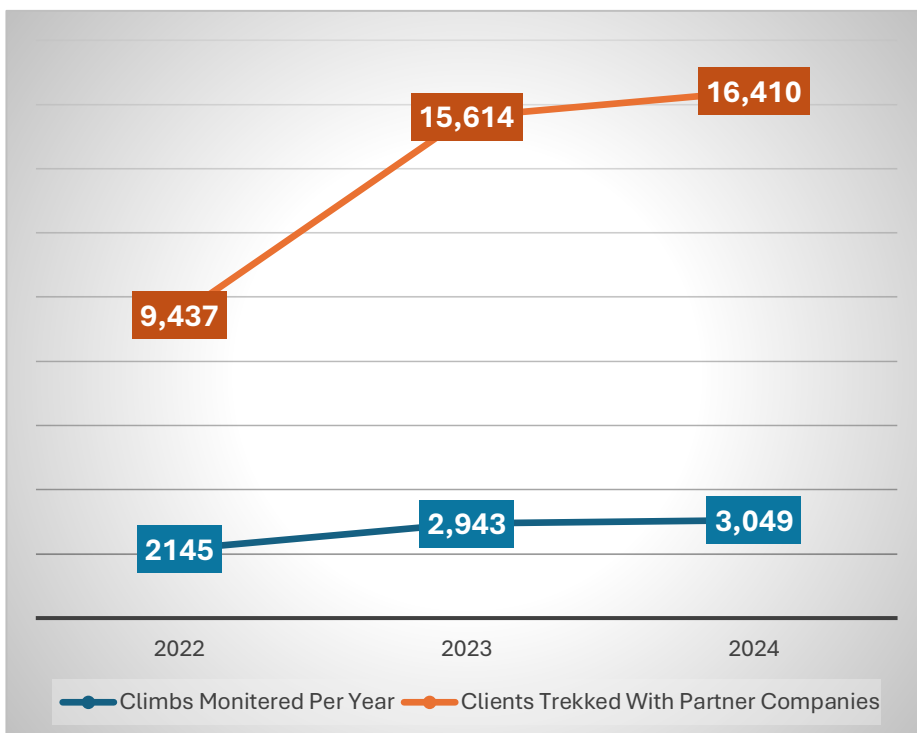
In addition, IMEC’s outreach to non-partner companies through annual surveys, ranging from **150 to 225** responses, demonstrates an ongoing commitment to transparency and inclusivity in improving industry standards. This consistent engagement underscores the strength of IMEC alliances in driving collective action toward ethical tourism.





# Reporting

## Climbs Monitoring



IMEC conducted monitoring of treatment practices on **3,049 climbs**, with **16,410 clients** that trekked with **57 partner companies**. We provided targeted feedback to companies, guiding improvements in procedures to meet ethical benchmarks.

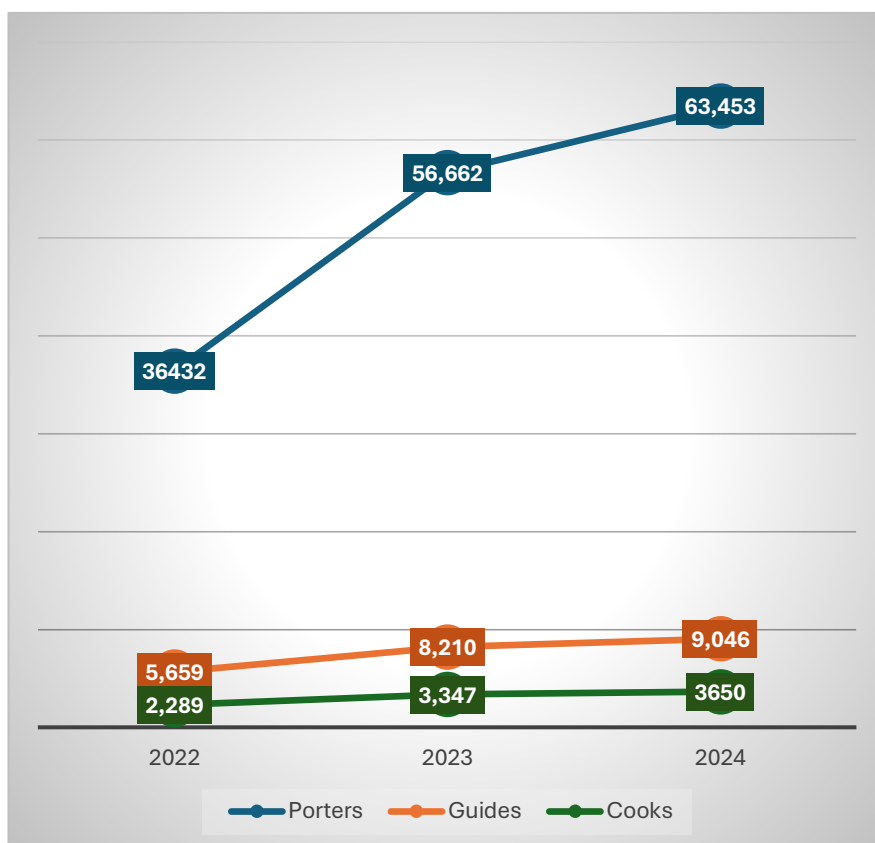
We conducted **20+ crew-management meetings**, engaging **2,397 mountain crew**.

Facilitated two training workshops for **over 170 investigative porters** to strengthen climb monitoring integrity.

## Job Creation

IMEC continues to make a significant contribution to local employment through its commitment to ethical and responsible trekking practices. Each role filled represents more than a job, it supports families, strengthens communities, and reinforces the value of ethical tourism in driving sustainable economic growth.

Between 2022 and 2024, IMEC supported climbs created a growing number of job opportunities on Mount Kilimanjaro. The number of porters engaged rose from **36,432** in 2022 to **63,453** in 2024, an increase of over **74%**, while the number of guides grew from **5,659** to **9,046**, and cooks from **2,289** to **3,650** during the same period.

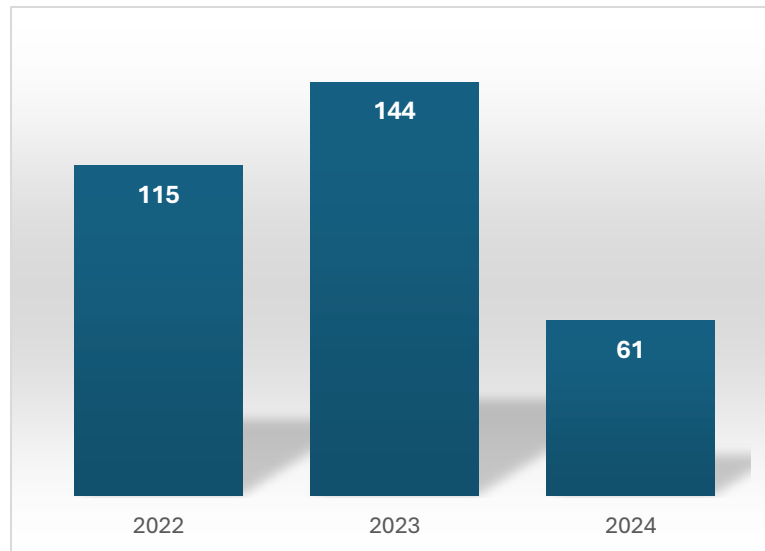




## Health and Safety for Mountain Crews

In line with global standards and local public health priorities, IMEC reinforce the safety and wellbeing of mountain crew members through:

- Regular monitoring of partner company compliance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), including COVID-19 prevention measures and hygiene protocols.
- Ongoing advisories regarding essential climbing gear to ensure crew members are adequately equipped for the mountain environment.
- Enforcing the use of personal protective gear and promoting safety awareness throughout the year via the Clothing Lending Program. We lent high-quality gear to **61 mountain crew** across various companies in 2024.



## Public Education and Sector Advocacy

Public education formed a cornerstone of our strategy in 2024, eg digital platforms such as a website, social media, and published articles to inform the climbing public about ethical porter treatment and working conditions.

Our local teams maintained active communication with both local and international tour operators to reinforce the implementation of proper treatment standards. Throughout the year, IMEC and/or our local organisations participated in several key industry events and stakeholder meetings to amplify its message and build collaborative opportunities. For example, regional labour meetings, KARIBU-KILIFAIR and international tourism trade fairs such as Indaba and WTM, to promote responsible tourism destination in Tanzania.



## PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDRAISING

IMEC's impact is made possible through the generous support and collaboration of a diverse network of funders and partners who share our vision for ethical trekking and sustainable mountain tourism. These partnerships provide the financial, institutional, and technical support necessary to sustain and grow our programs.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the individuals, foundations, companies, and institutions who continued to support our mission in 2024.

To ensure the longevity of our impact, IMEC is building a diversified donor base of individuals and organizations committed to mountain community development and launching a membership program for ethical trekkers.

### Foundation Supporters



Connecting people and communities around the world, The Intrepid Foundation allows travellers to support impact partners in the places they've visited. Operating in more than 100 countries, their global teams, backed by local knowledge and advice, help identify where change is needed and carefully select partners in their local areas who are making that change happen. In addition to Intrepid foundational support, the local DMC, through the foundation, matched the climber fees as its commitment to making a difference in Tanzania.



Established in 2019 to build upon decades of Exodus Adventure Travels' contributions to destination communities. It is their commitment to help create a world where all travel and tourism supports nature and communities to thrive in harmony. Their ongoing commitment and support to our initiatives is key to our ongoing success.



Rick and Marg Jensen have a special love of the mountains, and which took root and grew with each passing decade. They, along with their son and daughter, decided to establish this foundation in order to give back, focusing on helping individuals and organizations. Rick and Marg are pleased and grateful to be able to provide this support in an area that has given them so much. Their ongoing commitment and support to our initiatives is key to our ongoing success.

## Climber Contribution Fees



Climbing is an adventure that is made memorable and achievable thanks to the hard work and dedication of our porters. These local heroes carry equipment, prepare meals, and ensure the safety and comfort of climbers, all while navigating one of the world's most challenging terrains. Despite their crucial role, porters often face inadequate compensation, poor working conditions, and lack of recognition for their efforts.

We ask climbers to consider a minimum contribution of \$3 per climber as a Climber Contribution Fee. This fee directly supports these indispensable members of your climbing team. By contributing, you are taking a stand for ethical climbing practices and contributing to the sustainable development of local communities.

For the first season since implementation on 1 June 2024 to 20 November 2024 **9,000** climbers were recorded with a contribution fee value of **\$27k**. While the implementation has been challenging, and administrative management by partners slow to realise, only **\$10k** of these fees were transferred to IMEC by the end of the year.

## Individual Contributions

Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a significant difference in the lives of the porters and their families. By supporting IMEC, you not only ensure a more ethical and enjoyable climbing experience for yourself but also contribute to a brighter future for hardworking porters in the world. Though too many to name individually, each and every one of the contributions we have received from dedicated individuals and organisations collectively makes it possible for us to continue the work that we do.

These special people deserve our gratitude, and we give this freely on behalf of our beneficiaries for their ongoing generosity.





# Partners and Collaborations

## Partner companies



Our certified partner companies remained essential allies in advancing responsible trekking standards. By committing to ethical guidelines, including fair porter wages, load limits, proper gear, and access to food and shelter, these tour operators demonstrated industry leadership and accountability.

Partner companies actively participated in education sessions, porter welfare audits, and community development initiatives, reinforcing their role not just as service providers but as advocates for human rights and environmental stewardship. Their participation directly supports the implementation of key programs. The success and credibility of our mission are rooted in the dedication of these partners, whose continued engagement ensures that progress in ethical trekking remains both impactful and sustainable.

## Government Partners

We continue to collaborate with national and regional government institutions to align trekking practices with broader sustainable development goals. These partnerships are critical to advancing responsible tourism policy and ensuring environmental conservation in protected mountain regions.

In 2024, our work was supported by:

- Kilimanjaro National Park (KINAPA)
- Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA)
- Ministry of Tourism, Tanzania

## Collaborations



Robertson Outdoor Bursary (ROB), NGO, is a partner of IMEC. Together we realise different projects for porters and more, e.g. English lessons in 2025. Yvonne Robertson (ROB) climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in 2013.

“During the climb I was so deeply touched, and full of respect for the mountain crew that supported me, that I wanted to help them improve their lives. So, on my return I founded ROB to do just that”.

## Corporate Funders

Corporate contributions provide essential funding, technical resources, and visibility for our initiatives. In 2024, we were honoured to receive support from:

- The North Face Foundation
- Patagonia
- REI Co-op

Their investment fuels our community training programs, ethical certification systems, and educational outreach to trekkers and guides.

## Industry Partners

IMEC works closely with travel and adventure industry leaders to promote fair labour standards, porter welfare, and responsible travel practices. Our 2024 industry partners included:



- Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA)
- Leave No Trace Centre for Outdoor Ethics
- Sustainable Travel International

These alliances strengthen our collective efforts to mainstream ethical trekking across global tourism networks.

## Major Institutional Supporters

In addition to core partners, we extend our deepest appreciation to foundations and philanthropic organizations whose grants and strategic support empowered our work in 2024:



- The Patagonia Foundation
- Adventure Travel Conservation Fund
- The REI Cooperative Action Fund
- Leave No Trace Centre for Outdoor Ethics



**Kilimanjaro**

# FINANCE REPORT

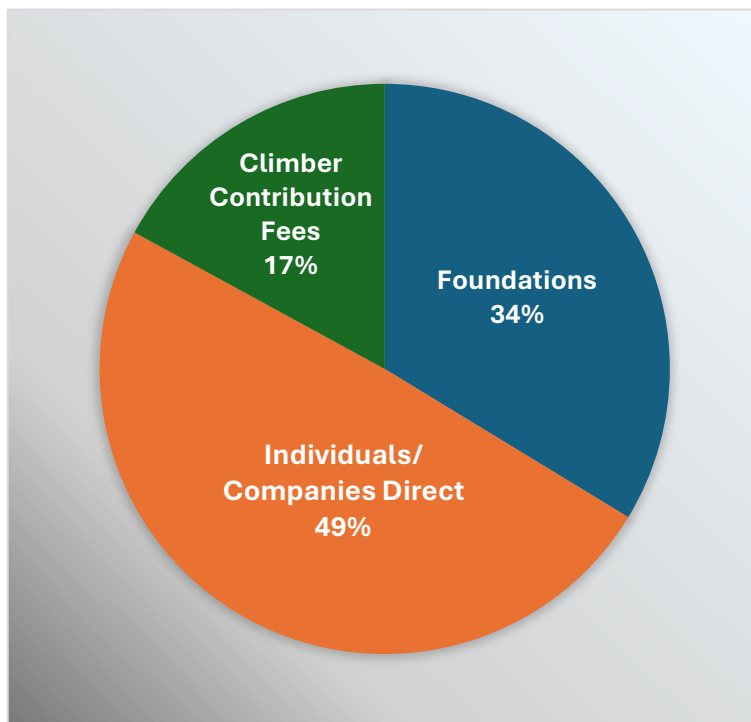
IMEC will focus on balancing operational costs with impact delivery, while strengthening efforts to secure consistent funding and expand cost-effective programming.

## Revenue

Over the past years, IMEC's income has experienced fluctuations, reflecting broader trends in funding availability, global economic shifts, and external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The organization remains committed to financial sustainability and is actively seeking diversified funding sources to ensure continued support for its community empowerment and environmental initiatives. Strategic fundraising, partnership development, and grant acquisition remain top priorities moving forward.

In **2024** the yearly income has been increasing to **\$53k**, signalling positive momentum and renewed fundraising efforts.



## Expenditure

Over the past years, IMEC's expenditure has reflected the organization's adaptive spending strategy in response to both operational needs and fluctuating income levels.

Due to the nature of the programme, which is labour intensive, most of the cost to achieve outcomes is in human resources. It is to be noted that all IMEC board members offer their guidance and support on a voluntary basis.

In **2024**, expenditure modestly increased to **\$56k**, as the organization began to reinvest in project activities.

The organization continues to prioritize financial prudence, ensuring that expenditures are strategically aligned with core mission goals.



## Programme vs. Administrative Expenditure

### Introduction

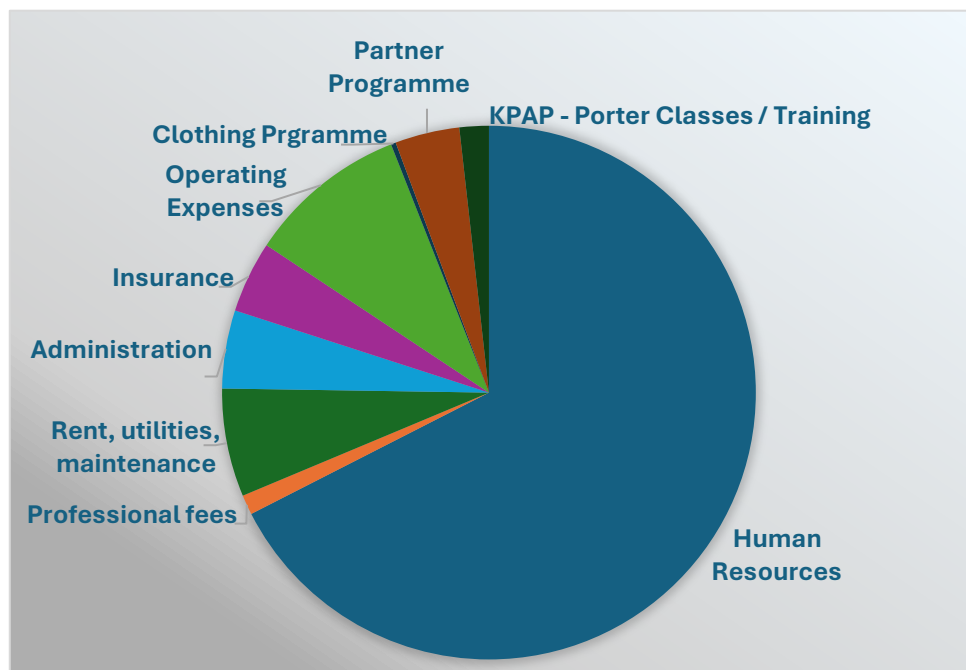
Over the past fiscal years, IMEC has maintained a clear focus on mission-driven spending, with a consistent majority of funds allocated to programmatic activities that directly impact mountain communities. IMEC allocated the bulk of its funds to programme activities, reinforcing its commitment to delivering high-impact initiatives such as the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) groups, alternative income generation training, and educational support for mountain crew members. Administrative expenses remained modest, ensuring maximum value from every donor dollar.

IMEC is dedicated to grassroots development by safeguarding programme funding, even while tightening administrative costs. This disciplined approach ensured essential services continued to reach beneficiaries, even during financially challenging years.

### 2024

The programme expenses accounted for **66%** of total spending, while administrative expenses represented **34%**. This allocation reaffirms the organization's prioritization of service delivery over operational overhead, with resources directed primarily to fieldwork, group supervision, and capacity-building efforts.

IMEC remains committed to transparency and efficiency, channelling the majority of its financial resources into activities that directly support the well-being and economic empowerment of mountain communities. This consistent investment in programme work underscores the organization's core mission and responsible financial stewardship.





## Kilimanjaro



**(Implementing Partner – Tanzania)**  
*(a legally registered Tanzanian NGO)*

**Email:** [info@kiliporters.org](mailto:info@kiliporters.org)  
**Website:** [kiliporters.org](http://kiliporters.org)



**International Mountain  
Explorers Connection**

*(a US 501(c)3 nonprofit organization)*

**Email:** [info@mountainexplorers.org](mailto:info@mountainexplorers.org)  
**Website:** [mountainexplorers.org](http://mountainexplorers.org)

