



Mro Ethnic in Myanmar

**Location:** Numbering just over 200,000 people, the Mro-Khimi are a complex collection of sub-tribes, dialect groups, and over 100 clans that have been combined to form the Mro-Khimi group. Most live in six townships in northern Rakhine State, with others across the border in two townships of southern Chin State, near Myanmar's border with Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup> The Mro-Khimi area is full of high, rugged mountains and dense forests. The British generally found the terrain too challenging to deal with and marked it as "unoccupied territory" for much of the colonial era. Even today, few sealed roads traverse the region.

**Identity:** Originally, the Mro-Khimi group was a combination of the Mro and Khimi tribes. In the 1931 census, the British government counted 13,766 Mro people, while the Khimi were probably counted under the Khumi tribe, who are now known to speak a different language than the Mro-Khimi.<sup>2</sup> They are one of 61 Chin tribes profiled in *Operation Myanmar*, which is eight more than the 53 Chin groups officially recognized by the government.

**Language:** Although all Mro-Khimi adults can speak their tribal

language, change has occurred rapidly and many young people now speak only Rakhine or Burmese. The Summer Institute of Linguistics has categorized the Mro-Khimi language as "threatened," with a 2012 study revealing that only 75,000 of the 200,000 Mro-Khimi people were able to speak their mother tongue.<sup>3</sup> Mro-Khimi consists of four dialects, of which Vakung is the most widely used and serves as the basis for their literature.<sup>4</sup>

**History:** According to the *Rakhine Chronicles*, the Mro people were the first people group to inhabit today's Rakhine State at around the time Christ walked on the earth.<sup>5</sup> They say they left their homeland in today's Tibet and slowly migrated southward, settling in several places along the way before finally reaching their present location. The Mro-Khimi people ruled the region and established a short-lived dynasty that lasted for 25 years, from AD 131 to 156.<sup>6</sup>

**Customs:** Although modern generations of Mro-Khimi have changed their style, in the past "women knotted their hair at the back of their heads while the men tied their hair on the top. Instead of hats, both sexes wore *petkala*, a kind of woven bamboo covering that protected their heads from the

rain."<sup>7</sup> Today, religion has shaped the customs of the Mro-Khimi people, with different traditions being observed by Buddhist, animist, and Christian communities.

**Religion:** In the past, almost all Mro people were animists with a few Buddhists among them. Today, most of the Mro group living in Rakhine State practice Buddhism, while the Khimi living north of the border in Chin State have a higher number of Christians. Many people have blended Buddhist and animist practices, even though Buddhism forbids the worship of *nats* (spirits) and other animistic rituals. The ancient Mro-Khimi people worshipped a main deity who was said to have created the universe and formed the first man and woman from the dust of the earth. When they were first exposed to Christian teaching, many Mro-Khimi people recognized the similarities between the Bible and some of their traditional beliefs and were receptive to the claims of Christ.

**Christianity:** Due to the rugged terrain and a myriad of other factors, the Gospel reached the Mro-Khimi later than almost any other group in southwest Myanmar. In 1931, H. Hacking and his wife explored the Mro-Khimi area, accompanied by nine Mizo evangelists. The first Mro-Khimi was baptized in April 1932, signifying the entrance of light into this spiritually dark tribe.<sup>8</sup> The work grew slowly, one convert at a time, with the first fellowship of 20 believers established in late 1932.<sup>9</sup> In July 1960, evangelists from the Mara tribe joined the work and many more churches were established. Today, approximately 16,000 Mro-Khimi people are professing Christians, although at only eight percent of the population, this makes them one of the more unreached Chin tribes in Myanmar. The Mro-Khimi New Testament was published in 2015, marking a key turning point in efforts to establish God's kingdom among this unique people group, the majority of whom continue to adhere to Buddhism.



**Population in Myanmar:**  
203,000 (2024)

**Location:**  
Rakhine State, Chin State

**Language Family:**  
Tibeto-Burman

**Main Religion:**  
Buddhism (55.0%)

**Christians:**  
16,250 (8.0%)

## OVERVIEW

**Population:**  
203,000 in Myanmar  
(2024 Joshua Project)  
13,766 Mro people  
(1931 census)

**Other Countries:**  
Probably in Bangladesh

**Other Names:**  
Awa Khami, Khami, Khumi Awa,  
Mro, Mro-Khimi Chin

**Location:**  
Rakhine State: Maungdaw  
and Buthidaung townships in  
Maungdaw District;  
Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U  
townships in Mrauk-U District;  
and Pauktaw and Ponnayyun  
townships in Sittwe District;  
Chin State: Matupi Township  
in Matupi District and Paletwa  
Township in Paletwa District

**Language:** Mro-Khimi [cmr]

**Dialects:** 4

**Scripture:**  
New Testament 2015  
Portions 2007

**Jesus film:** Mro-Khimi

**Global Recordings:**  
Mro-Khimi #5176

**People ID:** 19390

