

# the Khmer of Southeast Asia



**POPULATION:** 1,313,000

**PROGRESS:** 1.86% Christian

**BIBLE TRANSLATION:** Complete

## PEOPLE GROUP

The Central Khmer are the remnants of a civilization that once controlled southern Vietnam. They live along the southwestern border of Vietnam from the Tay Ninh province to the Can Tho province, and along the Mekong River. They speak Khmer, an Eastern Mon-Khmer language.

The Khmer Empire, which flourished between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, encompassed present-day Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam. Its power declined when the Thai and Vietnamese conquered the Khmer and restricted them to the area that now known as Cambodia.

Bombings, civil war, and war with the Vietnamese turned Cambodia into a killing field in 1970. At the same time, Vietnam was in civil war. Many of the Khmer in Vietnam fled their villages to escape the war. Some moved to refugee camps, but were resettled to New Economic Zones at the unification of Vietnam in 1975.



Brett epic at English  
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## WHAT ARE THEIR LIVES LIKE?

The Central Khmer have virtually been absorbed into the Vietnamese community. They have intermarried and now share the same religions, customs, and culture. Most of the Khmer are farmers who grow rice in irrigated paddies. They live in thatch roof, bamboo houses that are built on stilts.

In the 1970s, most of the Khmer were middle-income peasants who owned enough land and tools to farm successfully without relying on outside labor. There were very few poor among those living in the Mekong River Delta.

Fish and shellfish from the coastal waters and the plains of the Mekong River are a major resource for the Khmer. It is also the second most important staple food, after rice. Forestry was once a major industry in the area inhabited by the Khmer. However, most of the timber has now been used for reconstruction after the war.

The state now controls transportation, wages, education, medicine, health services, housing, food, and clothes; all of these goods are rationed. Rural education was badly disrupted during the war years, and all schools were nationalized after 1975. Twelve years of schooling are provided free.

More men than women were killed between 1975 and 1979, creating a skewed sex ratio among the Khmer. Today, mostly widows and orphans remain. The women are now required to perform duties that once belonged to the men.

The Khmer have a simple social structure. Each village has its own chief, and there is no political structure beyond the village. The village chief is the link between the people and the central government. Village leadership is usually divided; the chief has authority in secular matters, while the Buddhist monk has authority in religious issues.

## MINISTRY DESCRIPTION & PLATFORM

Teaching English as a second language is one possible platform for entering into this people group. You will begin your ministry with prayer walking/driving and learning language and culture while looking for open doors and bridges for the Gospel. As relationships are established discipleship can begin even before they have come to follow Christ. Since this is a very communal society, you will encourage them to share their questions and what they are learning with family and close friends. You will work alongside local field partners. You will look for resources, networks and opportunities for partnerships with other organizations and individuals as you develop strategies for multiplying movements among the Khmer.

*If you are a follower of Christ, have a heart for those who have not yet been reached, are ready and willing to relocate and learn a second language, are excited to build a team in the field with people from other cultures and if you are ready to respond to God's call to go, we are ready to send you.*

Email Jenny at [mobilization@global-teams.org](mailto:mobilization@global-teams.org) or visit <https://www.global-teams.org/letsgo>