



Human trafficking rackets in Thailand will become the target of a crackdown by authorities as Bangkok looks to rein in the flow of illegal workers into the country.

Employers who hire illegal migrants will also face arrest, the Thai labour ministry's Permanent Secretary Somkiat Chayasriwong told a press conference on 3 May. He added that anti-immigration officials would also pressure "all illegal migrants... through arrests".

It comes as Thailand prepares to issue a new round of work permits to migrants in the country, the majority of whom come from Burma. The process will begin between June and September this year, Somkiat said.

Yet the government has approached with caution the victims of human trafficking, many of which are tricked into leaving neighbouring countries for Thailand with promises of appetising salaries, only to be forced into almost slave-like conditions.

A decision was reportedly reached by the labour ministry yesterday to allow such victims who are unable to return to their home countries to work in Thailand.

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Anurak Tossarat, director of Thai labour ministry's Office of Foreign Workers' Administration, said: "A decision has been approved today to grant one-year temporary work permits for migrants under protection in Thai welfare centres undergoing trial after being trafficked into Thailand.

"So the trafficking victims will be able to find jobs and make income before they can return to their home countries."

The announcement has been welcomed by migrant rights groups, including the Burmese

Association in Thailand. Its foreign relations coordinator, Myo Naing, said however that Burmese migrants, who are thought to number up to three million in Thailand, should act with caution until they receive their permits.

Of the millions of Burmese in Thailand, only around 350,000 have legal work permits. Many work in low-skilled industries such as fishing and garments manufacturing, and because of their status are not protected under Thai labour laws.