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## Benelux: Amnesty, Soccer

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During the first several days of a three-week government amnesty, thousands of illegal migrants who had "lasting social ties," defined as having lived in Belgium since October 1, 1993 (or 1994 for migrants with school-aged children), applied for legal residence. Also eligible are migrants who have not received a final order of deportation, those from "risk countries" to which returns have been suspended, for example, Afghanistan and migrants who are seriously ill.

The amnesty, which runs from January 10-28, 2000, is expected to produce about 20,000 applicants; 1,300 applied in Brussels on January 10. The government estimates that there are 60,00 to 70,000 illegal migrants in Belgium; most are from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Belgium had an amnesty in 1974.

The government said: "Steps have to be taken to ensure this operation does not become a clarion call for illegal immigrants throughout Europe." To avoid an influx of migrants seeking amnesty, Belgium re-imposed border controls with its Schengen neighbors, as permitted by Article 2 (2) of the 1990 Schengen Convention, the agreement to protect its "national security."

Belgium charged that a Prague company owned by Ukrainians, East West Express, was smuggling foreigners into Belgium so they could apply for asylum. In one case, a young Albanian woman paid a trafficker \$5,000 to smuggle her to Brussels, where she says she was forced to work as a prostitute and earn at least \$500 a day or be beaten. Nearly half of the foreign prostitutes in Brussels are Albanian. Traffickers tell the Albanian women to say they are Kosovars and to apply for asylum. In 1995, Belgium made trafficking for the purpose of sexual and economic exploitation unlawful.

Soccer Slavery. In 1996, it was discovered that some African and Asian children were being sold into slavery to play soccer. The operation was discovered first in Belgium, but was underway also in Italy, Holland and Spain. If coaches decided a child would not make the team, he would be sent into the streets to fend for himself.

In November 1999, the Italian government reported that 5,000 children from Africa, South America and Eastern Europe had remained illegally after entering on tourist visas. If they make the team, soccer players can receive EU citizenship after five years. Manchester United was criticized for its partnership with Belgium's Royal Antwerp, a team considered to be a holding camp for non-EU players.

Between 1993 and 1998, the Dutch government permitted illegal migrants who could prove they had held jobs in the Netherlands and paid taxes for six consecutive years to become legal immigrants. In 1998, this policy ended, although a limited amnesty remained available until December 1, 1999.

*"Belgium restores external border controls," European Report, January 12, 2000. Constant Brand, "Thousands take advantage of Belgian amnesty for illegal immigrants," AP, January 11, 2000. Michelle Carlile, "Belgium faces rising tide of prostitutes," Reuters, November 16, 1999. Michael Butcher, "Clubs in Football Slavery Shame," The Scotsman, December 4, 1999.*

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