

Greek parents padlock school against refugee children as education plan gets underway

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For the second consecutive day, many of them kept their children at home, saying they want local authorities to address their concerns before they will end their boycott.

It was the most extreme protest against a plan being implemented by the Left-wing government of Alexis Tsipras, the prime minister, to give schooling to thousands of refugee children [who have been left trapped in Greece](#) since the Balkan migration route to northern Europe was blocked earlier this year.



An Afghan girl counts in Greek numbers on a wall during a lesson by a non-governmental organisation at a refugee camp in Athens. Most of the 60,000 refugees and other migrants stranded in Greece are living in "appalling conditions" and face "immense and avoidable suffering," Amnesty International said in a recent report. Credit: Thanassis Stavrakis/AP

Greek parents have denied that they are racist, claiming that instead they are concerned over health

issues.

They also say that many state schools are already overcrowded and under-resourced. But in some parts of the country their worries have been stoked by far-Right extremists, who are staunchly opposed to the education plan.

Around 60,000 asylum-seekers, many of them Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis, are stuck in Greece after its northern neighbours, including Macedonia, Serbia and [Hungary](#), closed their borders in the spring.

On Monday, on the first day of the school initiative, around 100 police officers formed a corridor to enable about 40 refugee children to enter the school in Profitis. "We are told these children have been vaccinated, but we don't believe them," one parent told the AFP news agency.

In other towns and villages in Greece, refugee children received a warm welcome from Greek parents and teachers. "These children fled war, fled hell," said Yiannis Boutaris, the mayor of Thessaloniki, who brought sweets for the new arrivals when they turned up at a school in the city. "Soon they will learn Greek, you will be able to play together," he said.

The Greek government wants more than 10,000 refugee children to be able to go to school while their families wait for their asylum applications to be considered. About 500 children attended classes in 20 schools across the country on Monday, the first day of the programme.

Thousands more are expected to join the scheme in the coming weeks. They will attend special afternoon classes where they will be taught in Greek and in either English or their own language. The long-term plan is to merge them into mainstream classes, once they have learned enough Greek.