

# Promoting integration through child care: Lessons from Norway

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# Background

- ▶ Well-documented that intensive and high-quality child care improves lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Havnes and Mogstad 2011; Drange and Havnes 2017; Cornelissen et. al. 2018)
- ▶ Hope that recruiting children with immigrant background into child care may enhance social mobility and encourage integration
  - ▶ Norway has currently a very high enrollment in child care at ages 3-6 for the majority population
  - ▶ Children of immigrants are still underrepresented in child care institutions
  - ▶ Child care should be particularly important for children of immigrants given that language is easier to learn at an early age (as suggested by among others Bleakley and Chin (2008))

# Universal Child Care in Norway

- ▶ Large expansions over last decade(s)
  - ▶ Recently a legal right to child care after age 1
  - ▶ Today more than 98 percent of children have been to child care before school start (August of calendar year the child turns 6)
  - ▶ Child care providers are municipal, not-for-profit private or for-profit-private
- ▶ Very generous public subsidies available
  - ▶ Detailed quality regulations
  - ▶ Low limit on parental co-payment (since 2003)

## Pilot projects in Oslo

- ▶ The first pilot took place from 1998-2004 in 2 (3) city districts in Oslo
  - ▶ Children got access to four hours of child care per day the last year before starting school
  - ▶ Active recruitment policies were implemented
  - ▶ Centers with many new children would have a tailored program of language development and new child care teachers were hired
- ▶ From 2006/2007 and onwards, free childcare became available in five city districts in Oslo for four and five year-olds
  - ▶ Four hours daily were free of charge, but families could expand to a full time slot if they paid a fee (amount depended on family income)
  - ▶ Active recruitment policies and tailored content
- ▶ In both programs, some city districts offered language courses to mothers when their child was in child care

## More details on the implementation

- ▶ The aim of both interventions was to improve the children's language skills and promote integration by providing them with some experience from pre-school/child care before starting school
- ▶ All children in the relevant city districts got access to four hours of free child care every day
- ▶ City districts recruited actively
  - ▶ approached families at home and through information in their own language
  - ▶ distributed information through the local health care centers
  - ▶ gave out information at other public information check-points, such as the social services office
- ▶ Particular emphasis on language acquisition for the new children (although unclear how systematic this was followed up)

# Finding effects of the interventions I

- ▶ A method often used to evaluate such interventions, is to make use of a difference-in-difference strategy
  - ▶ in the case of the first intervention we compare results at the end of compulsory schooling for
    - ▶ children in city districts that got access to free child care
    - ▶ to children in similar city districts in Oslo without free child care
    - ▶ before and after the intervention was introduced
  - ▶ we also study parents earnings in a similar set-up

## Finding effects of the interventions II

- ▶ As for the most recent intervention starting 2006/2007, we look at the following outcomes
  - ▶ take up of child care, where we compare child care use before and after children became eligible, across intervention and comparison districts
  - ▶ parents education and earnings in a similar set-up
  - ▶ test scores in first, second and third grade, comparing children across intervention and comparison city districts

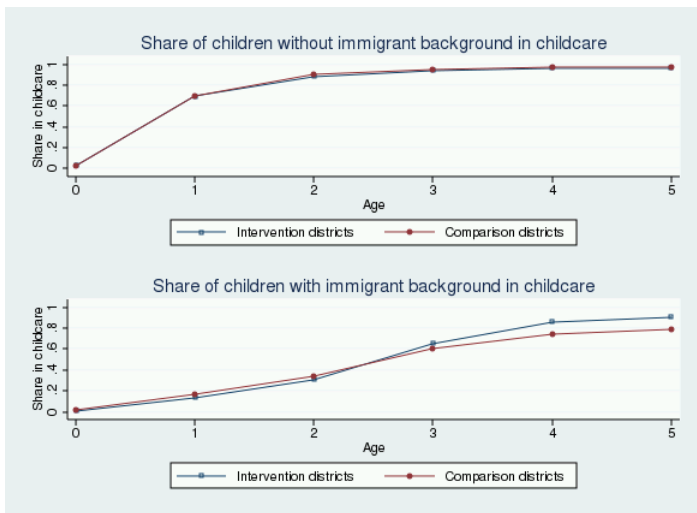
## Results for the older children and their parents

- ▶ Children affected by the intervention starting 1998 have finished compulsory schooling
  - ▶ We find that girls' grades improve if they had access to free child care
  - ▶ Boys' grades are unchanged
  - ▶ Effects are fading, and are clearly largest for the first cohort affected (improves on average about one grade in two subjects)
- ▶ For parents, we find that
  - ▶ mothers of girls are more likely to have earnings corresponding to a low-paid part time position
  - ▶ also small effects for fathers of both girls and boys



# Results for the younger children: Enrollment in child care

Figure: Enrollment in child care



## Results for the younger children and their parents

- ▶ Children affected by the intervention starting 2006/2007 have completed the early years in school
  - ▶ We find that grades improve if they had access to free child care
  - ▶ Results are similar for girls and boys
  - ▶ Estimates are similar across 1-3rd grade
- ▶ For parents, we find that
  - ▶ neither education nor earnings are affected by this intervention

# Discussion

- ▶ Is free child care a promising policy to improve integration?
  - ▶ the offer of free child care did increase enrollment in centers
  - ▶ better school results could help close the achievement gap between children with and without immigrant background
  - ▶ a positive effect on parental outcomes is indeed promising, although evidence is not consistent across the two interventions we have been studying
  - ▶ it is likely that certain elements could have improved how effective the interventions were
    - ▶ clustering across centers is common in Oslo, also within city districts, and this may influence the language environment in centers
    - ▶ the optimal start age is not clear, but age four/five may be on the late side

## Current child care policies in Norway

- ▶ In 2015, a national policy was introduced, giving all four and five year-old children from families with an income below a certain threshold the right to free child care for 20 hours a week
- ▶ At the same time it was decided that a family should not spend more than 6 % of their total income on child care expenses
- ▶ In 2016, the income threshold was increased, along with including three year-old children
- ▶ The family income threshold was 450 000 in 2017/2018, and will be increased to 533 500 in 2018/2019