

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

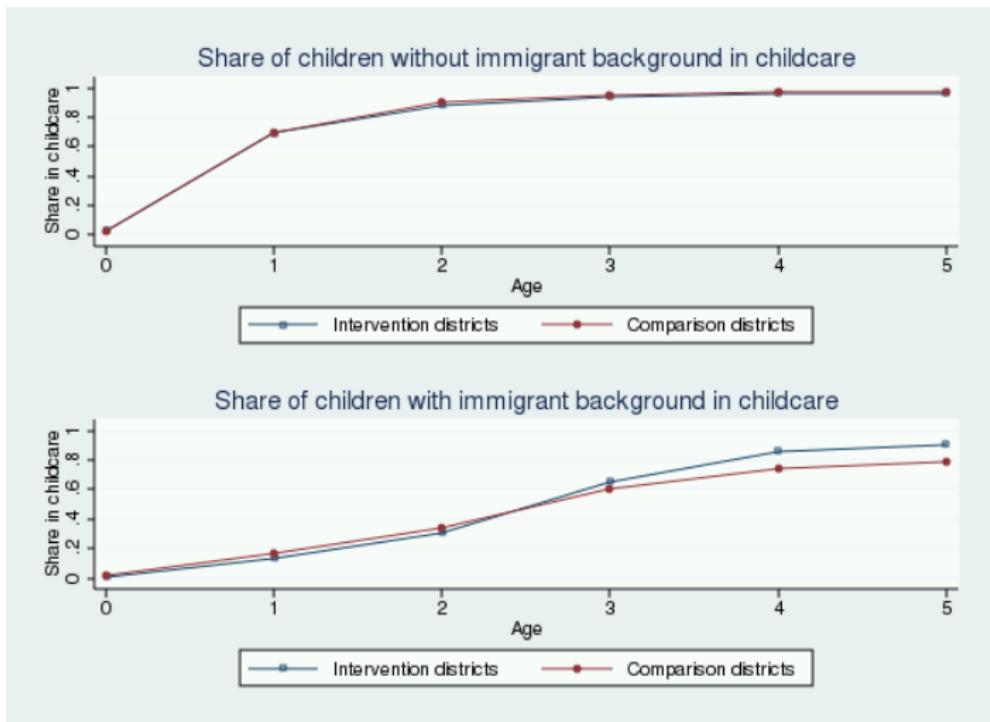
- ▶ As for the most recent intervention starting 2006/2007, we look at the following outcomes
 - ▶ take up of child care, where we compare child care use before and after children became eligible, across intervention and comparison districts
 - ▶ parents education and earnings in a similar set-up
 -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