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Promoting the integration of immigrants: Lessons from a policy providing free child care

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- From 2007 and onwards free childcare became available for all children in 5 city districts in Oslo, Norway
- At the time, a survey revealed that the Norwegian skills of 70% of children from immigrant families was too poor to follow ordinary teaching at school entry
- The main aim was to recruit children from immigrant families and to improve their Norwegian skills
- Child care free of charge was available for four and five year-olds, i.e. during the last two years before the child started school



- Content of the policy:
 - Four hours daily in child care were free of charge, but families could expand to a full time slot if they paid 50 % of the full fee (about 120 EURO)
 - Initiatives to improve language training in centers
 - Active recruitment policy: If child was not in child care by age four, the family was approached by the local authorities
 - Through home visits
 - At local health centers
 - At other information points where city district representatives were present

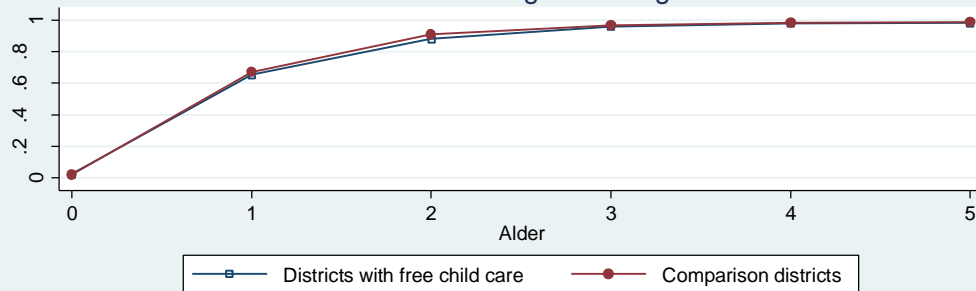


- We have implemented a counterfactual evaluation of this intervention
 - Free childcare became available in five city districts in Oslo, leaving the remaining ten unaffected
 - We exclude the three city districts with lowest share of immigrant children to help comparability
 - Of the remaining seven comparison districts, three of them have had former, similar interventions
 - Children are attributed to city district according to where they live at the beginning of the year in which they turn 4

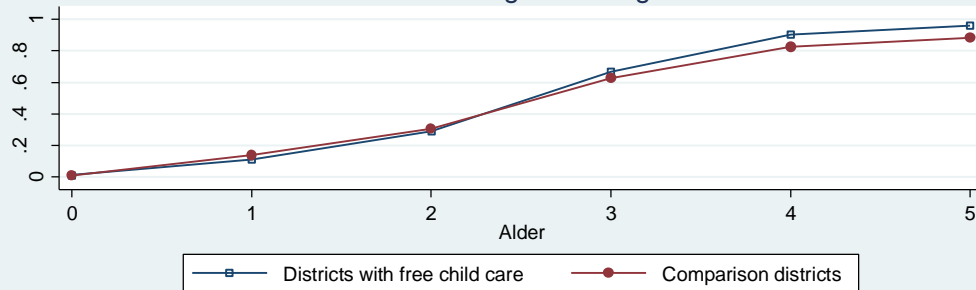


- To find the effects on enrollment in child care:
 - We compare child care use among children with immigrant background before and after they are eligible for free child care
 - in city districts with and without the policy
- To look at how children's school performance is affected by the policy:
 - We compare children with immigrant background to children without immigrant background (not affected by the policy)
 - in city districts with and without the policy

Share of children without immigrant background in child care



Share of children with immigrant background in child care





- Our evaluation suggests that:
 - Providing child care free of charge led to a 15 % increase in child care enrollment of children with immigrant background
 - Free child care helped bridge the gap in formal child care attendance between native and immigrant groups
 - Parents' employment and education was not affected by the intervention
 - Higher enrollment in child care was associated with better cognitive scores in first, second and third grade
 - This finding was robust to including a non-affected comparison group