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Projet de recherche et de collaboration scientifique

During the last decades, the influence of early childhood on long-term children outcomes has been the focus of much research. Growing attention has been devoted to the role of early education programs to raise average outcomes and compensate initial disadvantages related to the background of origin. In this spirit, there has been an increasing commitment worldwide to give children a better start through high-quality and universal pre-school programs. The available evidence, however, about the effects of these programs shows a complex picture, with differences across countries, time and types of intervention (i.e. targeted vs universal programs). While the beneficial role of several targeted pre-primary education program for treated children has been documented, the evidence on the effect of universal programs is rather limited since causal identification can seldom rely on sharp discontinuities in the programs' implementation. Most of what is known deals with short-term outcomes. Much less has been learned about the long-run distributional effects of attending universal pre-school programs, with the limited available evidence showing a complex picture.

This project contributes to this literature by providing causal evidence on the long-run impact of universal pre-primary education program, by understanding whether the effects come from participation or duration (years spent in pre-school) of the program.

The project looks at the French experience of École Maternelle (EM hereafter), one of the oldest and largest highly subsidized pre-primary universal education programs worldwide. Over the 1960s and 1970s, France undertook a large-scale expansion of EM supply, leading to a sharp increase in pre-school enrollment. The project exploits variations across places and cohorts in new EM facilities, created after the institution of a large subsidization plan, to identify exogenous increments in the duration (up to three years) of EM program locally offered.

Preliminary results show that that while the EM expansion significantly raised attendance and duration, long-term effects on education and earnings are on average not significant. However, effects are heterogeneous according to parental socio-economic status, with children from middle background who significantly gained in terms of both education and earnings, compared to both lower and upper background children.