

# **Public policy and early childhood systems in Europe**

*6 challenges for the coming years*

# The OECD Starting Strong evaluations

From 1998-2004, 20 countries invited the OECD to review ECEC policy & provision

- Australia 
- Austria 
- Belgium Fl 
- Belgium Fr 
- Canada 
- Czech Rep. 
- Denmark 
- Finland 
- France 
- Germany 
- Hungary 
- Ireland 
- Italy 
- Korea 
- Mexico 
- Netherlands 
- Norway 
- Portugal 
- Sweden 
- UK 
- USA 

# Starting Strong I and II



- Vol. I put forward 8 key elements of ECEC policy
- Vol. II examines how countries have implemented these elements since 2001 Includes also several annexes:
  - Profiles of 20 countries
  - Research summaries showing positive socio-economic or educational effects from ECEC programmes

# Preliminary remarks

The *Starting Strong* reviews were based

- On the values of freedom, equality, participation and solidarity.
- On Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child **“in all actions concerning children ... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”**.
- On the early childhood tradition of a happy/healthy childhood with learning driven by the children’s interests and active involvement with the world around them... but that the support and direction of the pedagogical staff are critical
- On the belief that social development (care and upbringing) is as important as cognitive development

*“All who work in the pre-school should work toward ensuring that the individual child develops the ability and willingness to take responsibility, to exercise influence in the preschool, and work towards ensuring that the opinions and views of each child are respected.”*

- To Nordic listeners in particular, a quick word...

## **A summary of this presentation**

### **6 challenges for the coming years. There is a need**

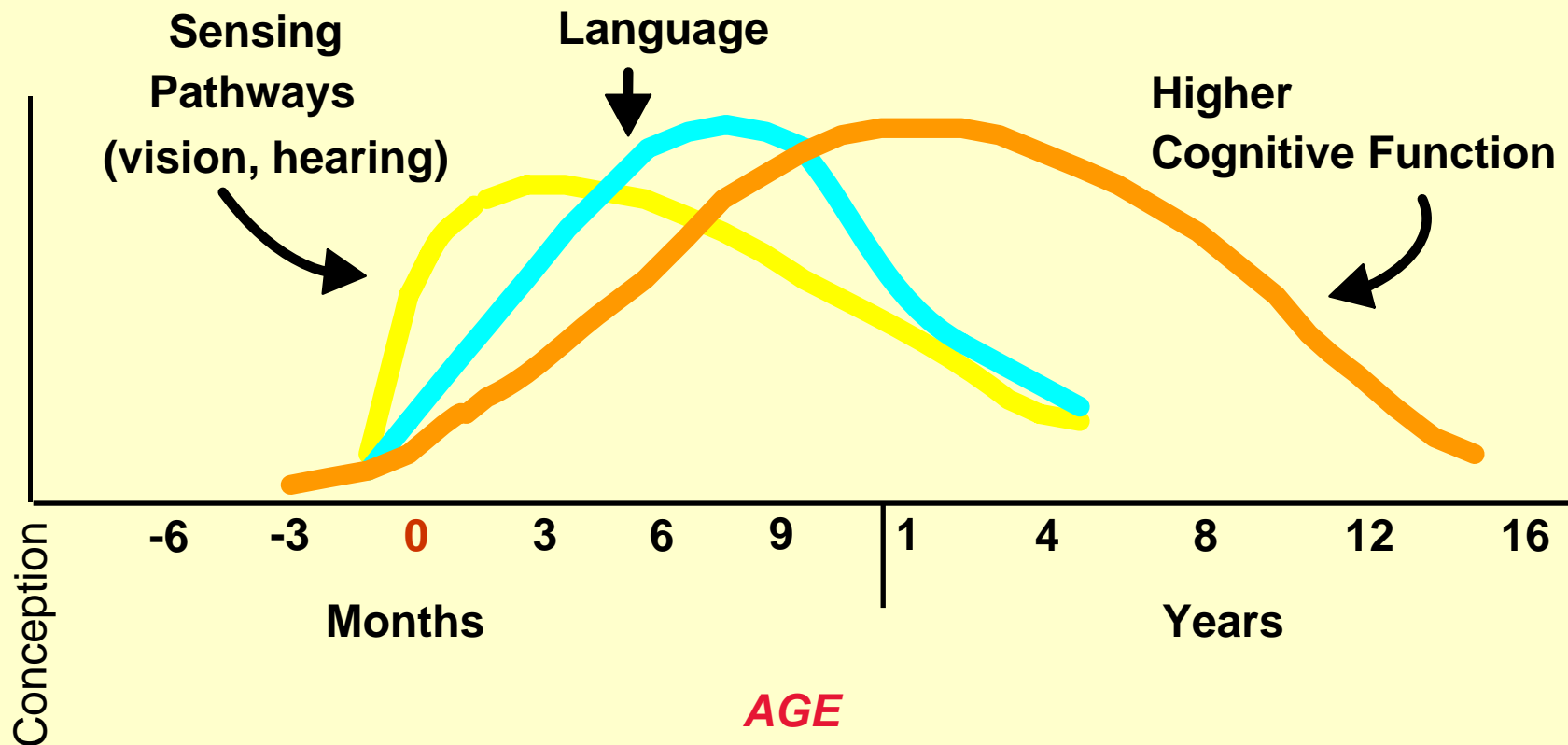
- 1. To give more attention to 0-3 years and remove the split between childcare and early education**
- 2. To reduce child poverty and discrimination against children from low-income and diverse family groups**
- 3. To provide more active support to families, and in particular to women**
- 4. To support quality assurance and self-evaluation in EC services**
- 5. To preserve the 'red thread' in professional education**
- 6. To continue to learn from and with each other**

## **Challenge 1**

**To give more attention to 0-3 years and  
remove of the split between childcare and early education**

# Human Brain Development – Synapse Formation

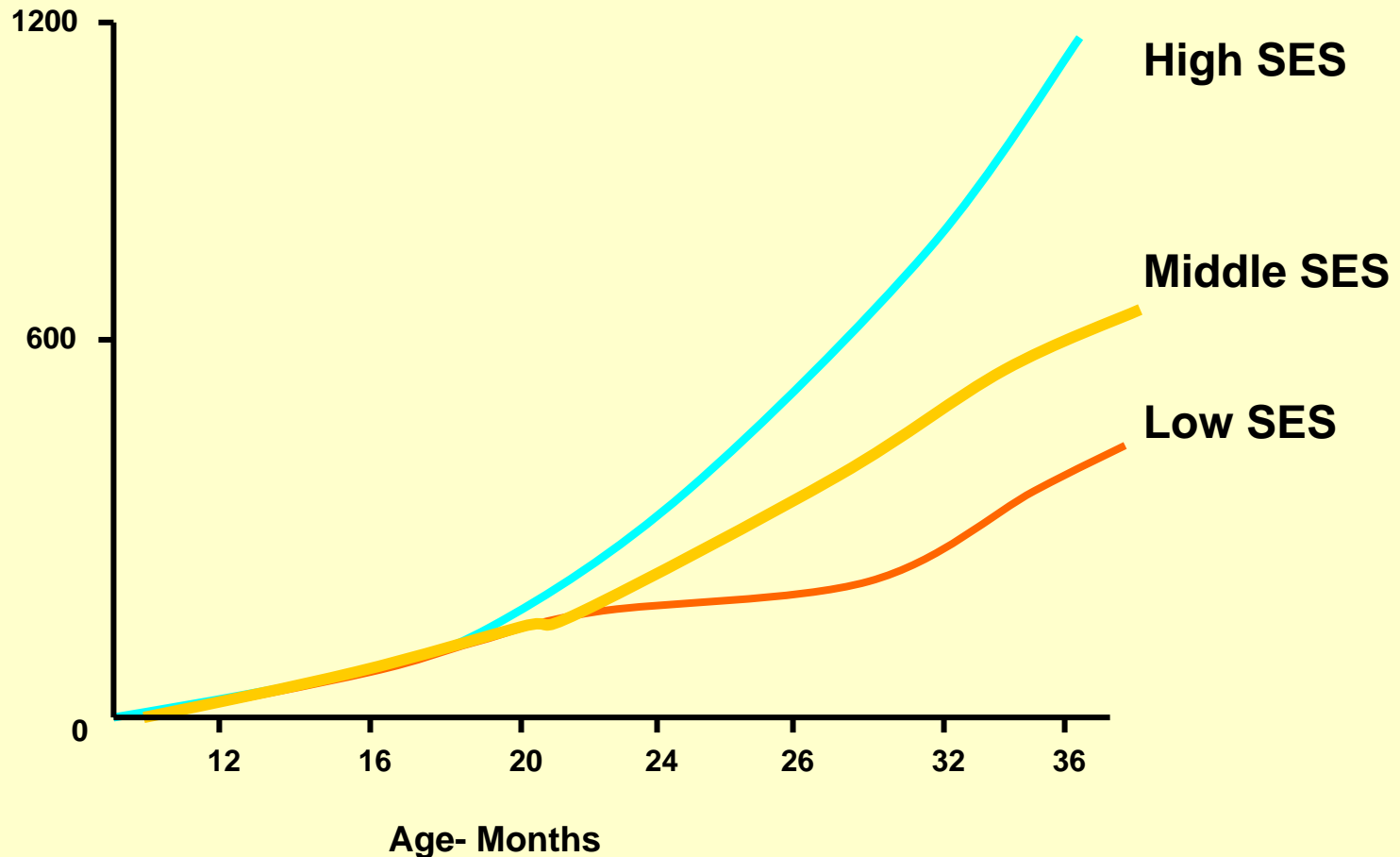
*Early childhood is an optimal moment to support sensory, cognitive, social & language development*



C. Nelson, in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, 2000

# Vocabulary Growth – First 3 Years

Vocabulary



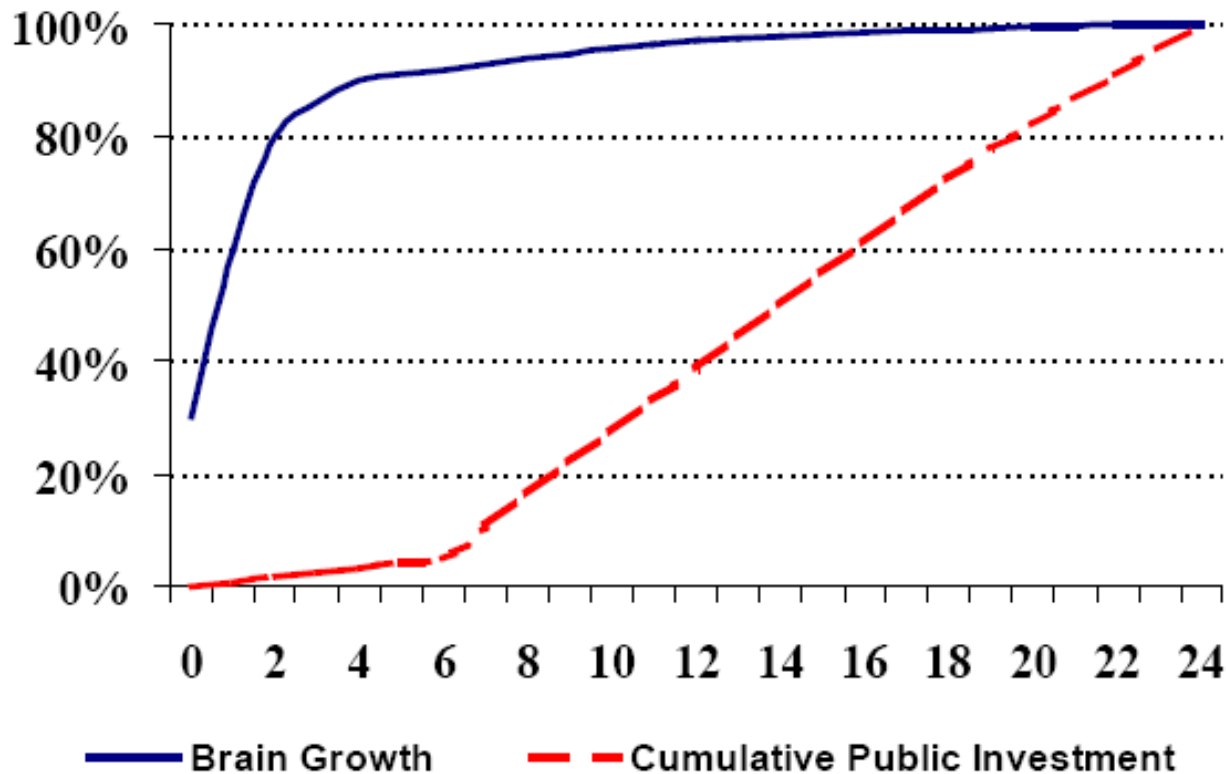
Source: B.Hart & T. Risley. Meaningful Differences in Everyday Experiences of Young American Children, 1995

## US investment in education related to brain growth

Although 85% of a child's core brain structure is formed by age three, less than 4% of public investments in education and development have occurred by that time

(Source: Child and Family Policy Center, 2004)

### Brain Growth and Public Investments by Child Age



**Split systems continue in Europe** despite the presence of an excellent Nordic model that seems more firmly based in research and good practice – the OMC

- **Fewer than 10 countries (half of which are Nordic) have integrated their services**
- **An outstanding Nordic model exists**
  - **Combines care, upbringing and learning across the age group**
  - **Ensures parental leave of about 1 year or more (young children enter services from 12 to 18 months)**
  - **Trusts in both the agency of the child & the competence of staff**

## **Challenge 2**

**To reduce child poverty and remove discrimination against children with special rights**

- **Children from low-income families**
- **Children from ethnic backgrounds**
- **Children with special education rights**

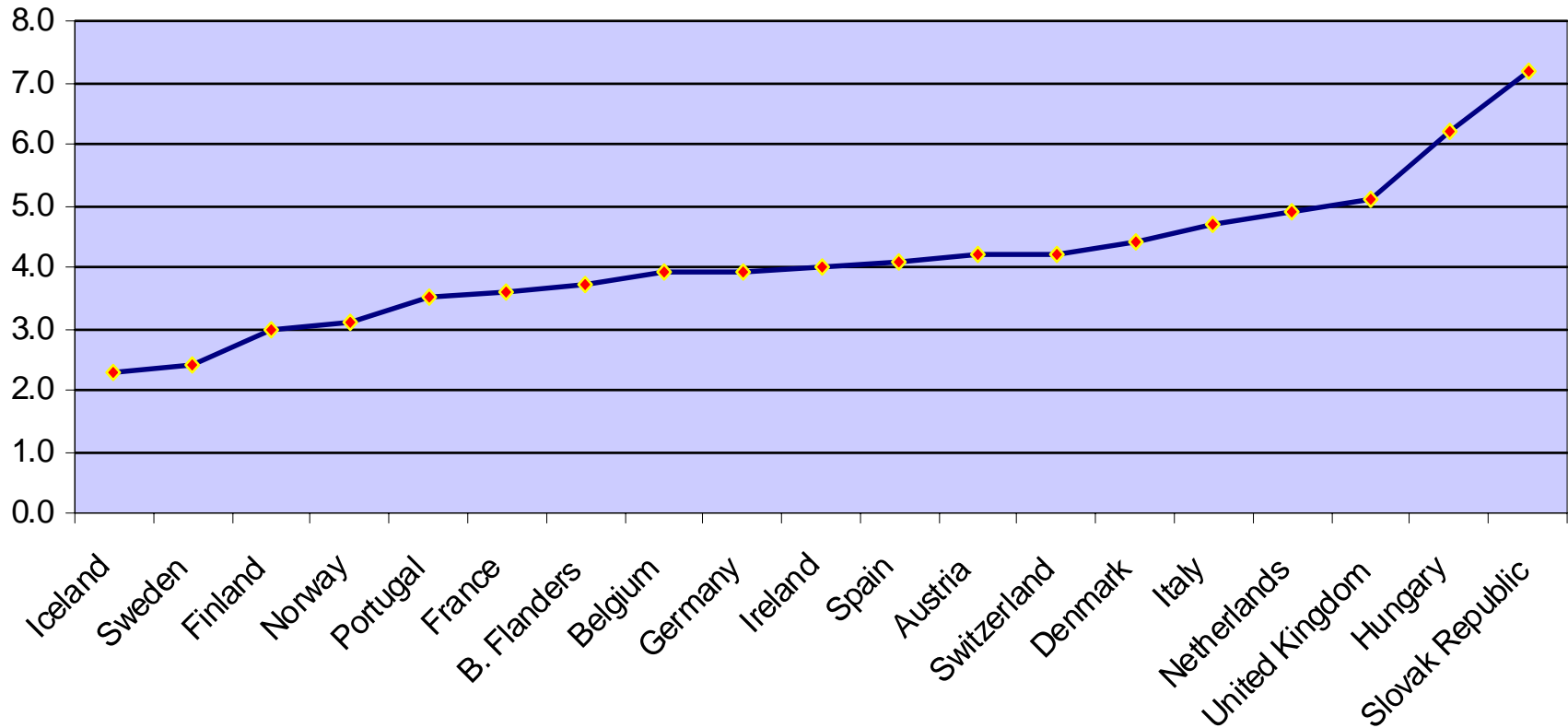
## Why is child poverty so damaging?

- **Compelling evidence of critical and sensitive periods in development**
- **Recurrent challenges – in all countries - for children from low-income families**
  - **Problems with basic capacities such as vision, hearing, speech or mobility;**
  - **Delayed vocabulary development (+33%) compared to only 8% of children in high-income families**
  - **PISA – influence of s-e background. In Canada...**

*Source: Ross et al. for the Canada Council of Social Development, 2003*

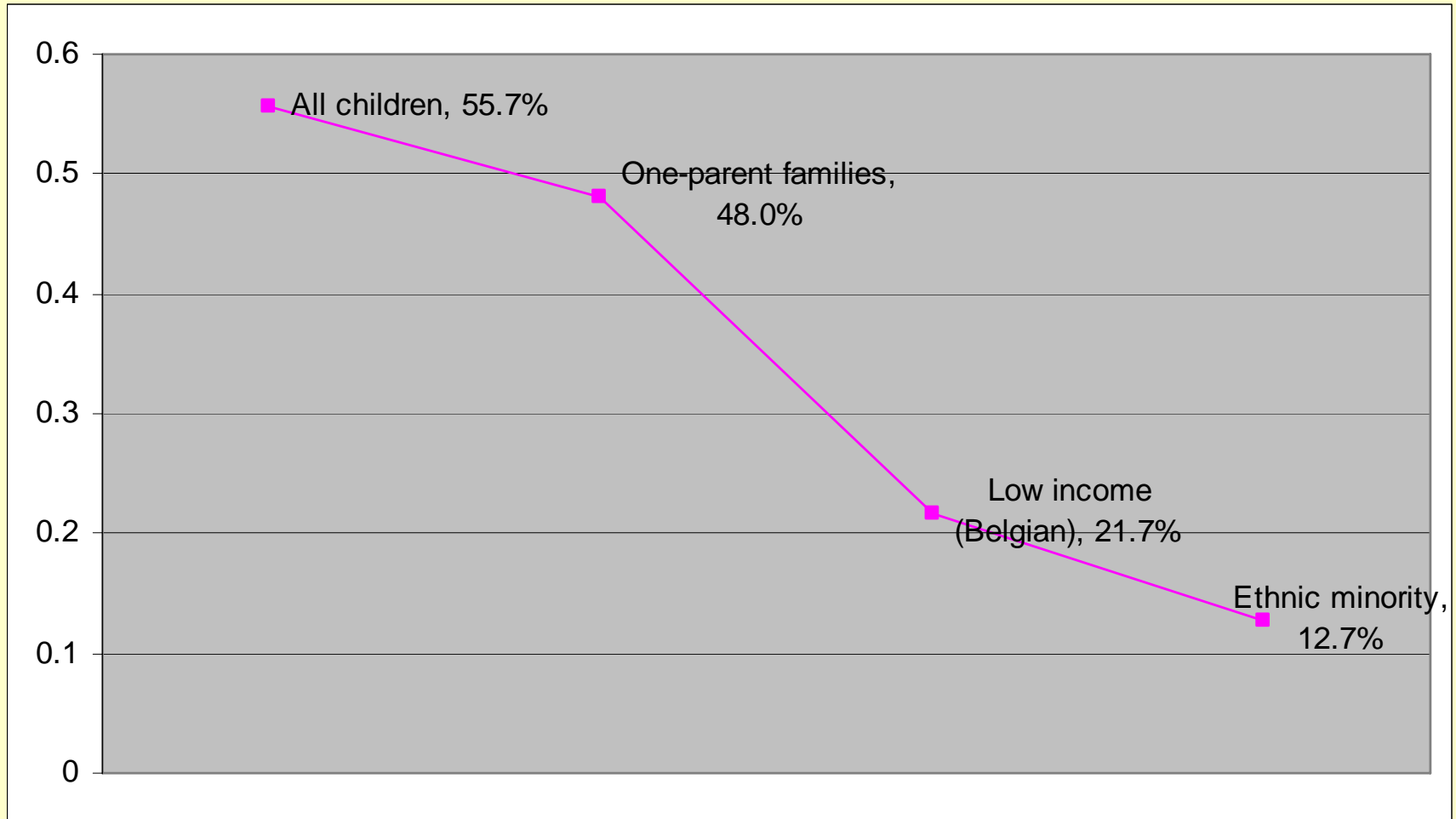
# Wide disparities in infant and child health services (maternity services) across Europe

Infant mortality rates in European countries, 2005



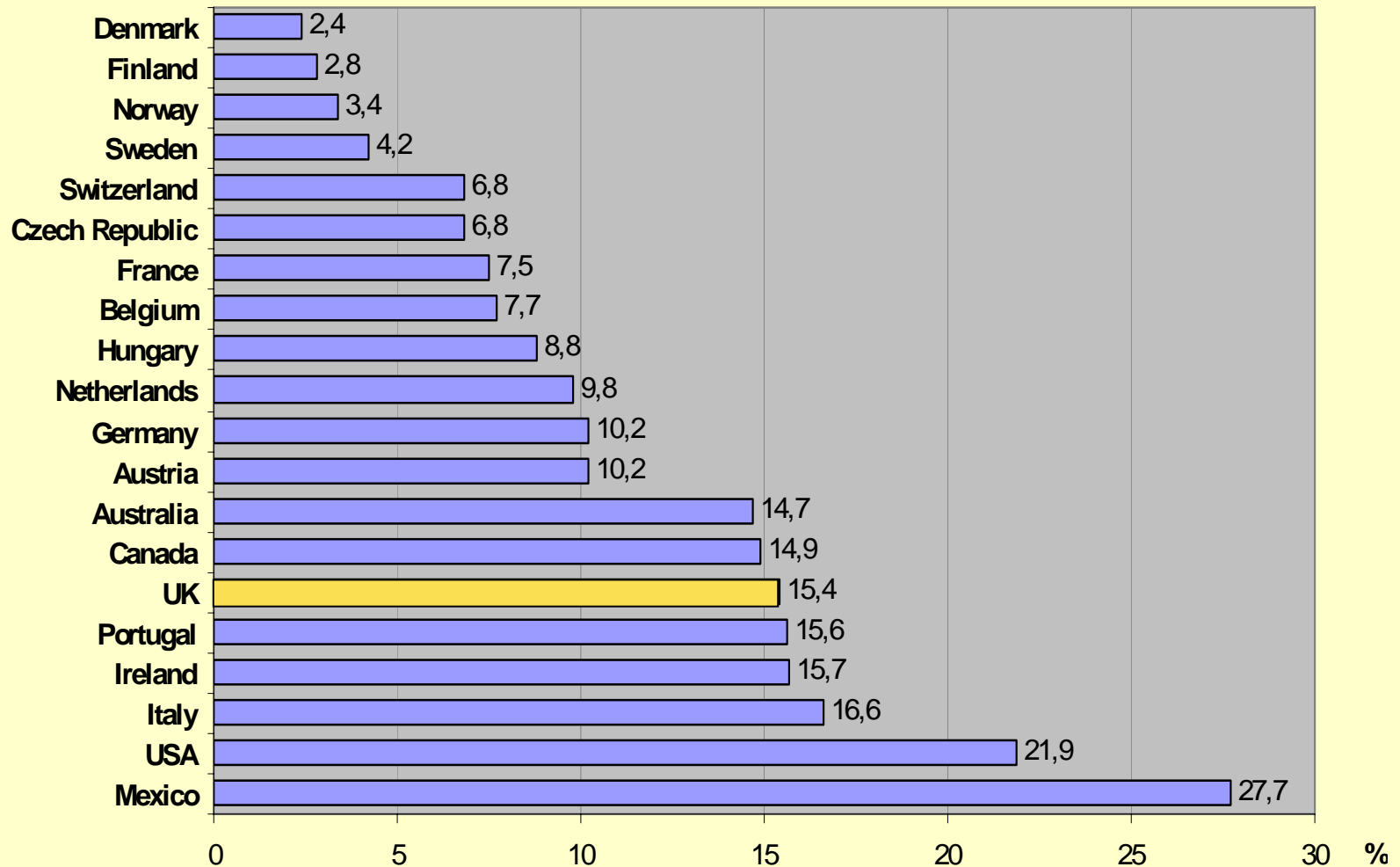
# Use of childcare (0-3 years) by different groups in Flanders

(Source: Kind en Gezin, *Child in Flanders, 2006*)



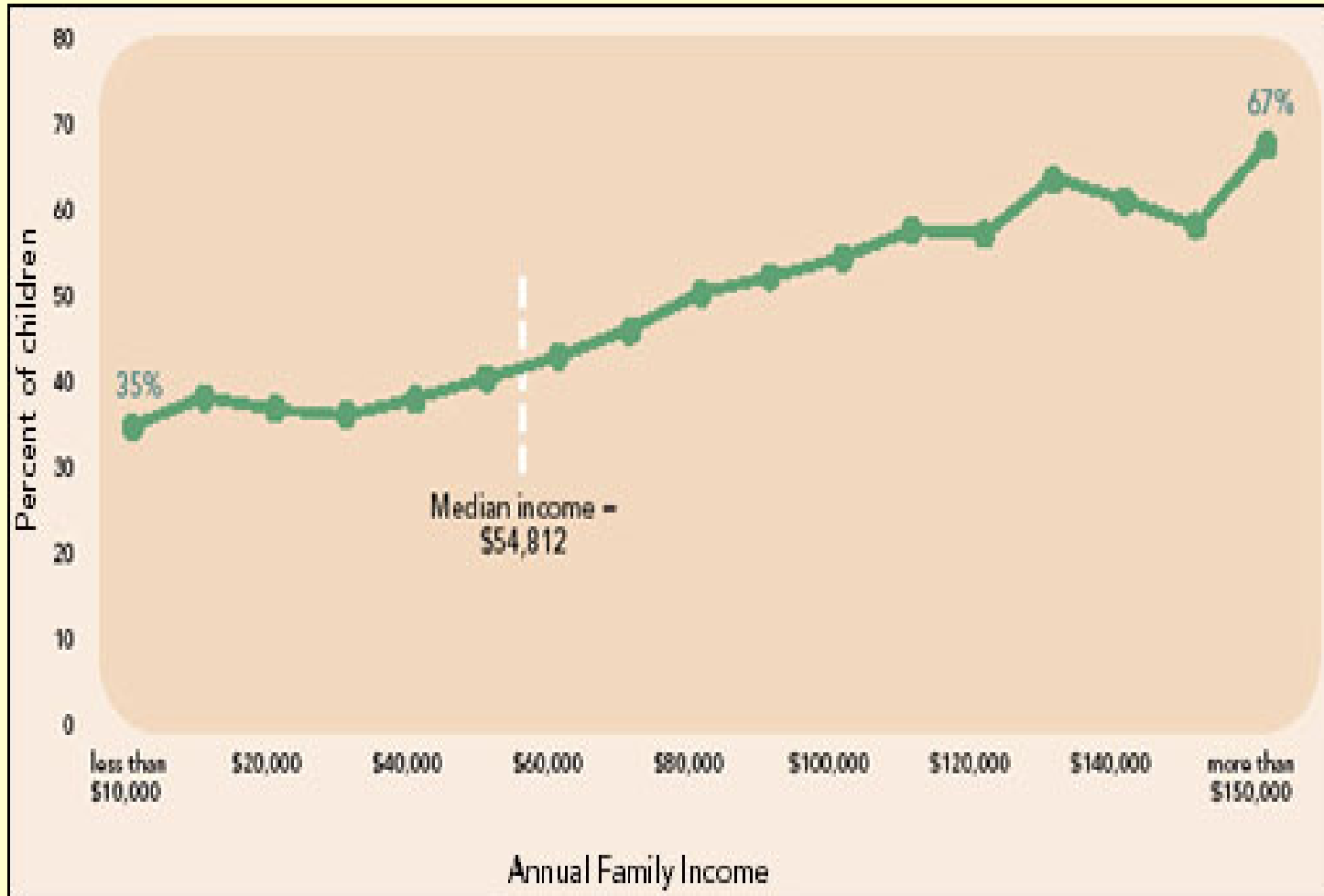
## Child poverty is a serious concern (Source: UNICEF/OECD, 2005)

“Inequality has risen significantly since 2000 in Canada, Germany, Norway & the US & declined in the UK, Mexico, Greece, Australia” OECD, 2008



# Pre-school access in the USA by level of income in 2005

(Source: EPE Research Center, 2007)



## **Challenge 3 - To provide more active support to families, and in particular to women**

**In supporting families and parents, governments should seek**

- **To ensure that, despite work obligations, parents (both fathers and mothers) have time with their children...**
- **To encourage parental leave that is gender fair : 'not to long, not too short and not too maternal'...**

## What is the actual situation in European countries?

- Parental is often too short and sometimes too long...
- With few exceptions, parental leave is taken predominantly by women; in many countries, paternity leave is token.
- Equal opportunity is still denied both *to* work and *in* work:
  - Wage discrimination against women... c. 80% of male wage for equal work
  - Women segregated into part-time work or into the 4 Cs:
  - Childcare services are insufficient in many countries, with services often unaffordable for families on modest incomes

# Poverty and barriers to social participation are often gendered

## The Gender Gap Report 2007

Women's health and survival; Economic participation and opportunity; Educational attainment; Political empowerment

### Country rankings

1. Sweden
2. Norway
3. Finland
4. Iceland
5. N. Zealand
6. Philippines
7. Germany
8. Denmark
9. Ireland
10. Spain

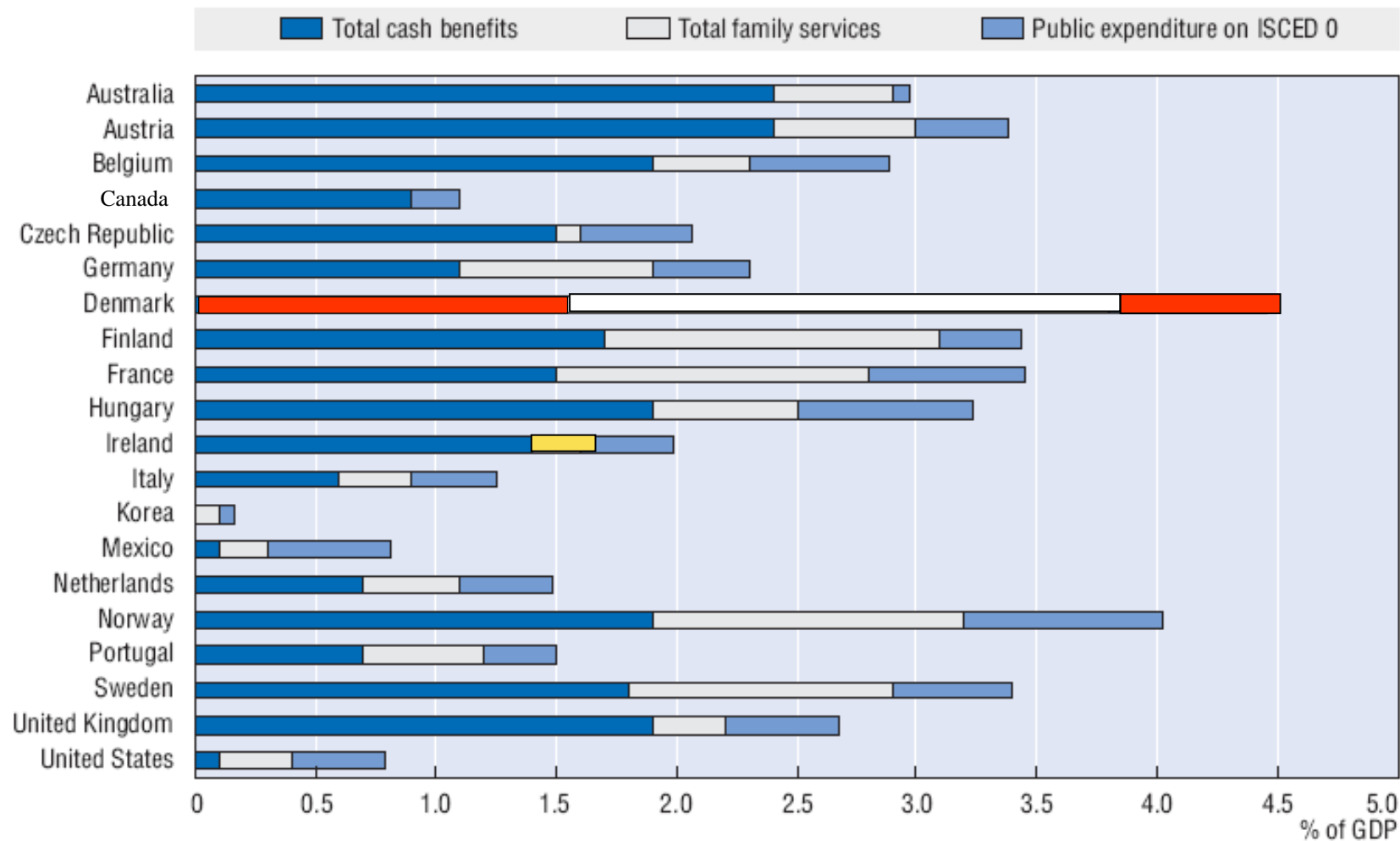
*In 2007, Latvia (13) and Lithuania (14) made the biggest advances among the top 20 countries, gaining six and seven places respectively, driven by smaller gender gaps in labor force participation and wages.*

***The USA ranks No. 31***

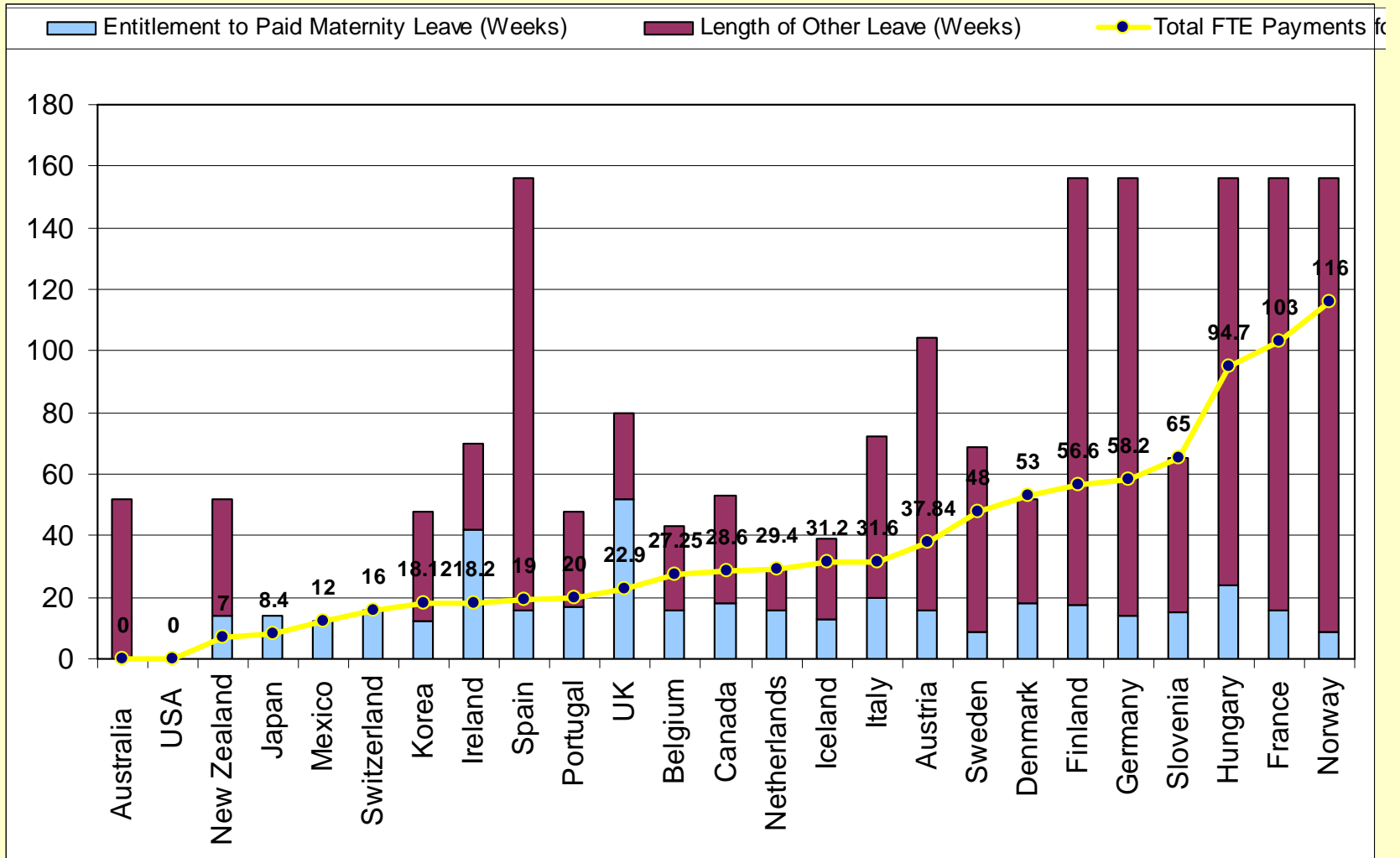
*Source: Gender Gap Report, 2007*

# Spending on families and children's services can be weak ...

(Source: OECD, 2006)

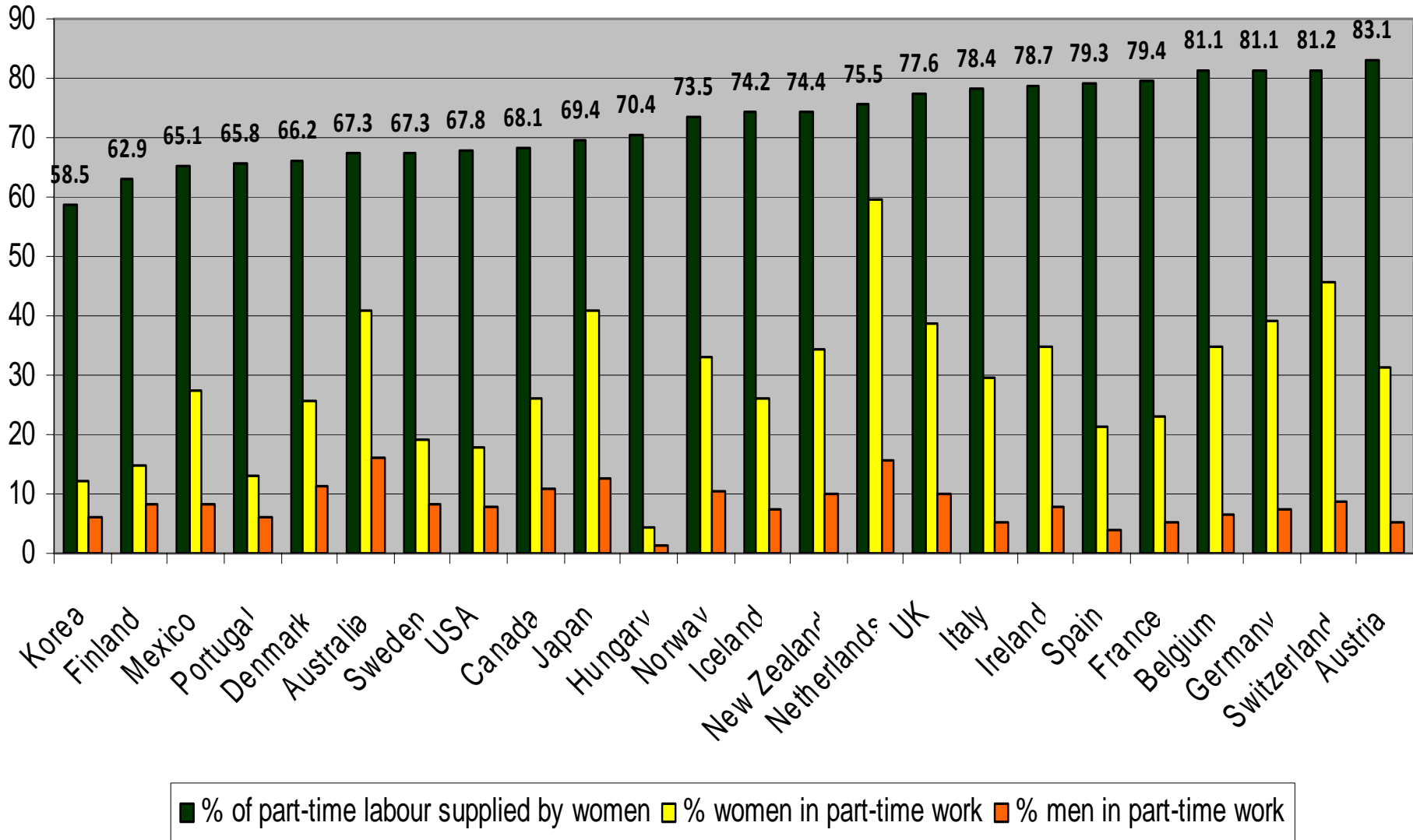


# Effective parental leave in EU countries



# Part-time work rates of men and women, 2006

(Source, OECD 2008)



## Why is it important to support families?



- Dr. James J. Heckman is the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago. Professor Heckman is the recipient of the 2000 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, (with Daniel McFadden), the 2005 Jacob Mincer Award for Lifetime Achievement in Labor Economics, the 2005 University College Dublin Ulysses Medal, and the 2005 Aigner award from the Journal of Econometrics. He is the author of: *Inequality in America: What Role for Human Capital Policies?*, numerous other books and hundreds of technical articles related to economics.
- **For ECEC researchers, what is most interesting about Dr. Heckman is the direction of his recent work. He has developed compelling economic models and arguments for investing in family and early childhood services... Although still a deficit approach within an unequal society**

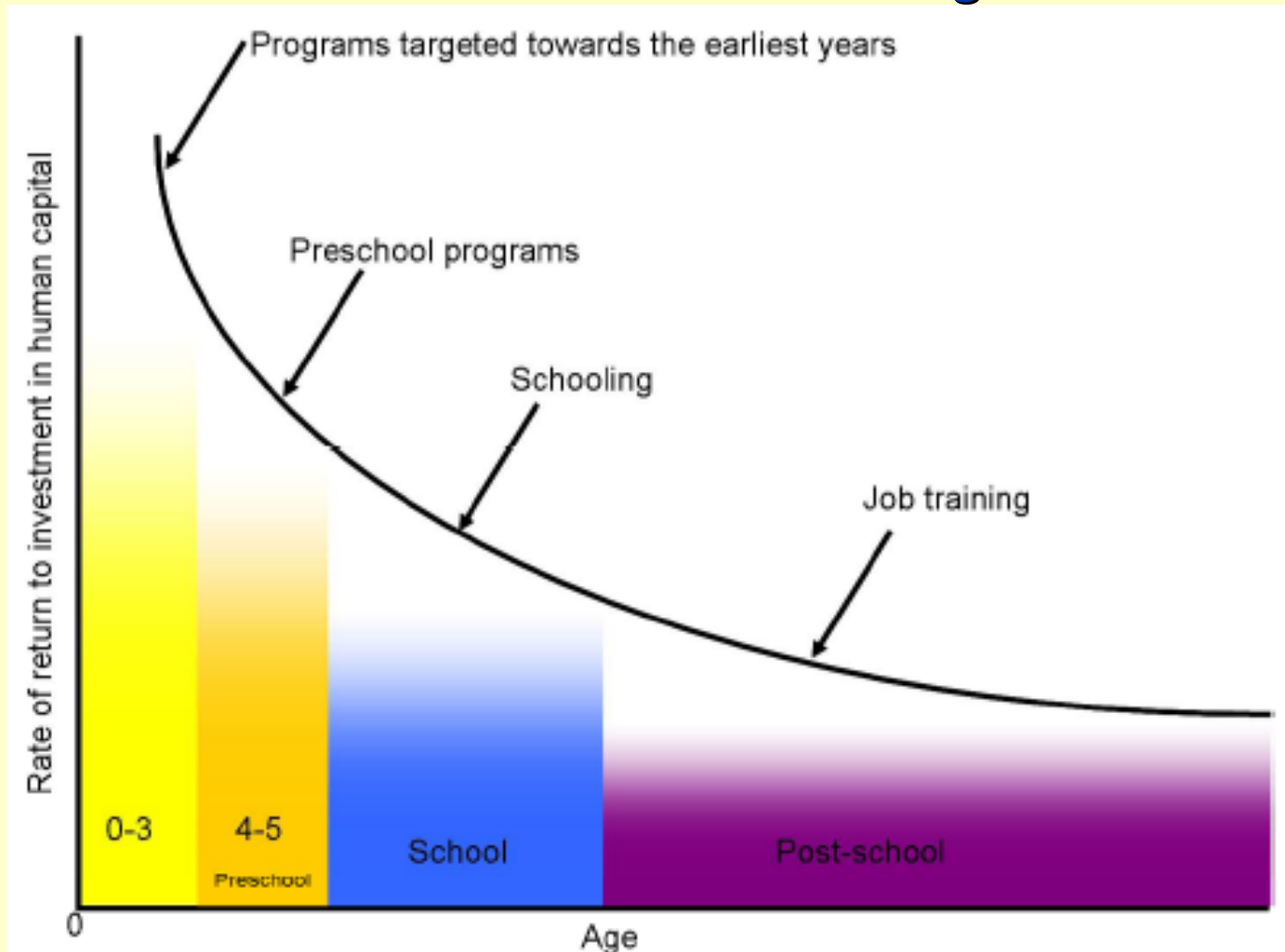
➤ Source: P. Carneiro & J. Heckman (2003), *Human Capital Policy*, NBER, 2003; Heckman (2008) *Schools, Skills, and Synapses*, Institute for the Study of Labor, IZA DP No. 3515)

# What needs to be done

Heckman is saying (as many paediatricians & EC experts before him)

- *“Policies that supplement the child rearing resources available to disadvantaged families reduce inequality and raise productivity”.*
- *That in addition to cognitive abilities, certain primary human traits—such as emotional stability, self-regulation, sociability, motivation to learn... need to be nurtured in early childhood, if not in the family, then in EC services*
- *That governments need to strengthen the front-line services for at-risk families with young children... maternity, infant health, outreach health nursing, social services, early education with parental involvement, that is, they need to ensure comprehensive early childhood education & care services*

## Heckman's curve - rates of return to human capital investments across all ages



*Heckman, 2008: Schools, Skills, and Synapses*

# Challenge 4 – Quality assurance

## Reflections on quality assurance

- **Definition of quality: structures, contents, process, outcomes**
- **Sometimes, a means of governance and control...**
- **The importance of ongoing centre and staff self-evaluations and support to them by administrations**
- **Some elements are difficult to measure through staff evaluations or accreditation exercises, e.g. the child's story and deep learning**
- **Documentation...**

## **Challenge 5 - To preserve the 'red thread' in professional education**

***“Staff working with children in ECEC programmes have a major impact on children’s early development and learning. Research shows the links between strong training and support of staff – including appropriate pay and conditions – and the quality of ECEC services” Starting Strong II, OECD, 2006***

# Professional education

- What is **'the red thread'**?
- Different interpretations depending on each country's understanding... but we do know that:
  - The professional education of both childminders and 'childcare' personnel is unsatisfactory in most countries
  - In 'early education', the research points towards a specificity of pedagogy and practice for the early years. What then are we to think of: the trend toward abstract university training, toward generalist training (Denmark, Sweden...) or, frankly, primary school teacher training...
- Professional education needs to preserve the traditions of kindergarten pedagogy (respect for the child's natural learning strategies), along with strong theoretical foundations, much classroom experience, practitioner research and training in working with parents, local schools and communities.

## **Serious attention needs to be given to staff qualifications and conditions of work in the 'childcare' field**

- *Starting Strong 2* notes that *"Data from various countries reveal a wide pay gap between child care staff and teachers, with child care staff in most countries being poorly trained and paid around minimum wage levels."*
- There is a danger that the expansion of early childhood services, if not matched by improved status for the workforce, will increase female inequality in the labour market and the numbers of the 'working poor'.
- The early childhood field should be source of *good quality* employment – as opposed to a route from welfare to work - and the value of childcare work needs to be recognised in qualifications and earnings.

# **Challenge 6 – To learn from and with each other**

## Learning from and with each other...

- The phrase is from Peter Moss... a history continued in *Children in Europe*
- No one country has the entire story...
- The example of Sweden... or more recently CiS which has published a monograph on San Miniato
- The role of EECERA and its review : *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*
- The work of Eurochild and other NGOs - going beyond the Barcelona targets to stress quality and the primacy of the well-being of children
- The role of the OECD...
- A new interest being manifested by the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission. An open meeting 14 October 2008

**Come in numbers...**

**Thank you!**