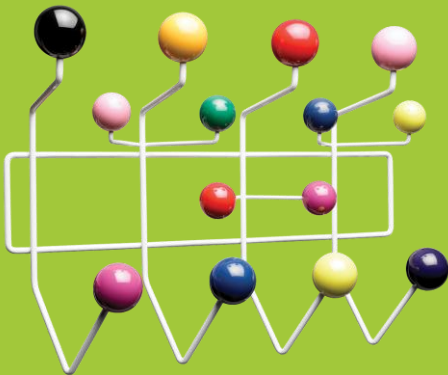


The inclusiveness of early childhood education and care: some key research questions

Idesbald NICAISE

KU Leuven (HIVA / FPE)



ECEC for disadvantaged groups: the international experience



Head Start (USA)

Early Start (Ireland)

Sure Start, SSLP (UK)

Opstap, Piramide, Kaleidoscoop (NL)

Head Start (US)

Characteristics

- **Selective** (most deprived neighbourhoods)
- **Holistic** (psychomotor development, health, motivation, cognitive development...)
- **Maximum possible parent participation**

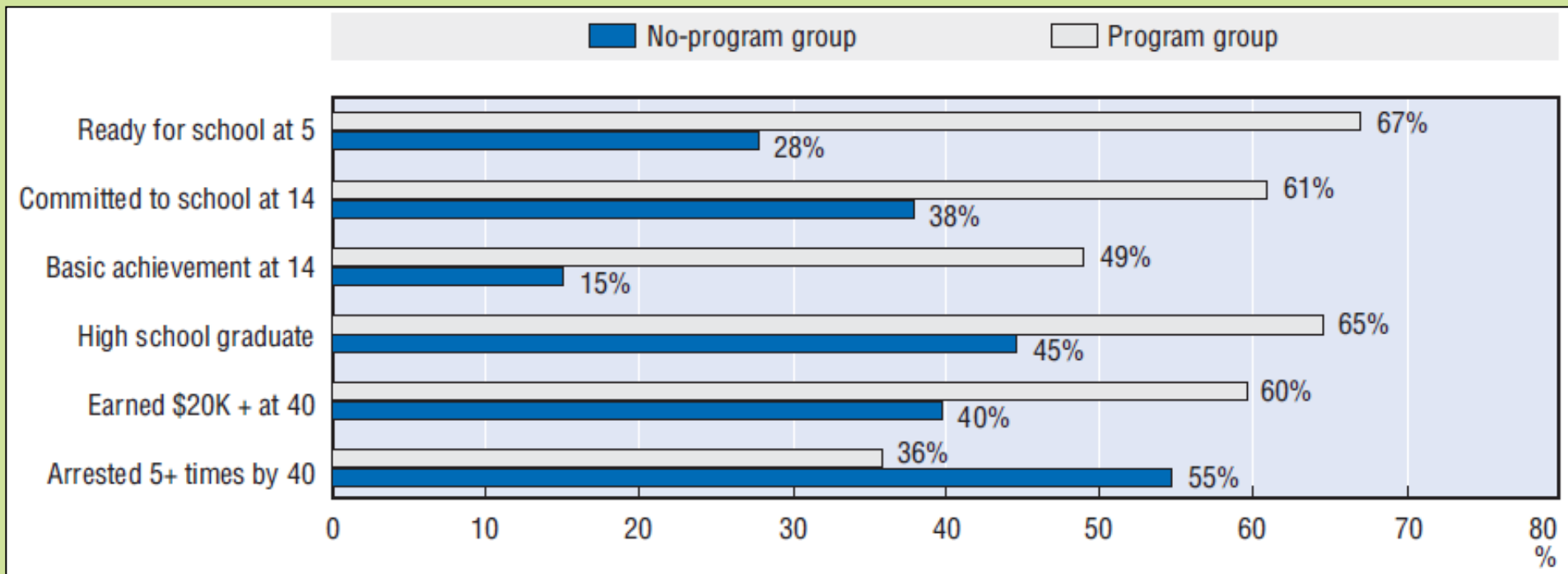


Head Start - evaluation

Effects of Head Start

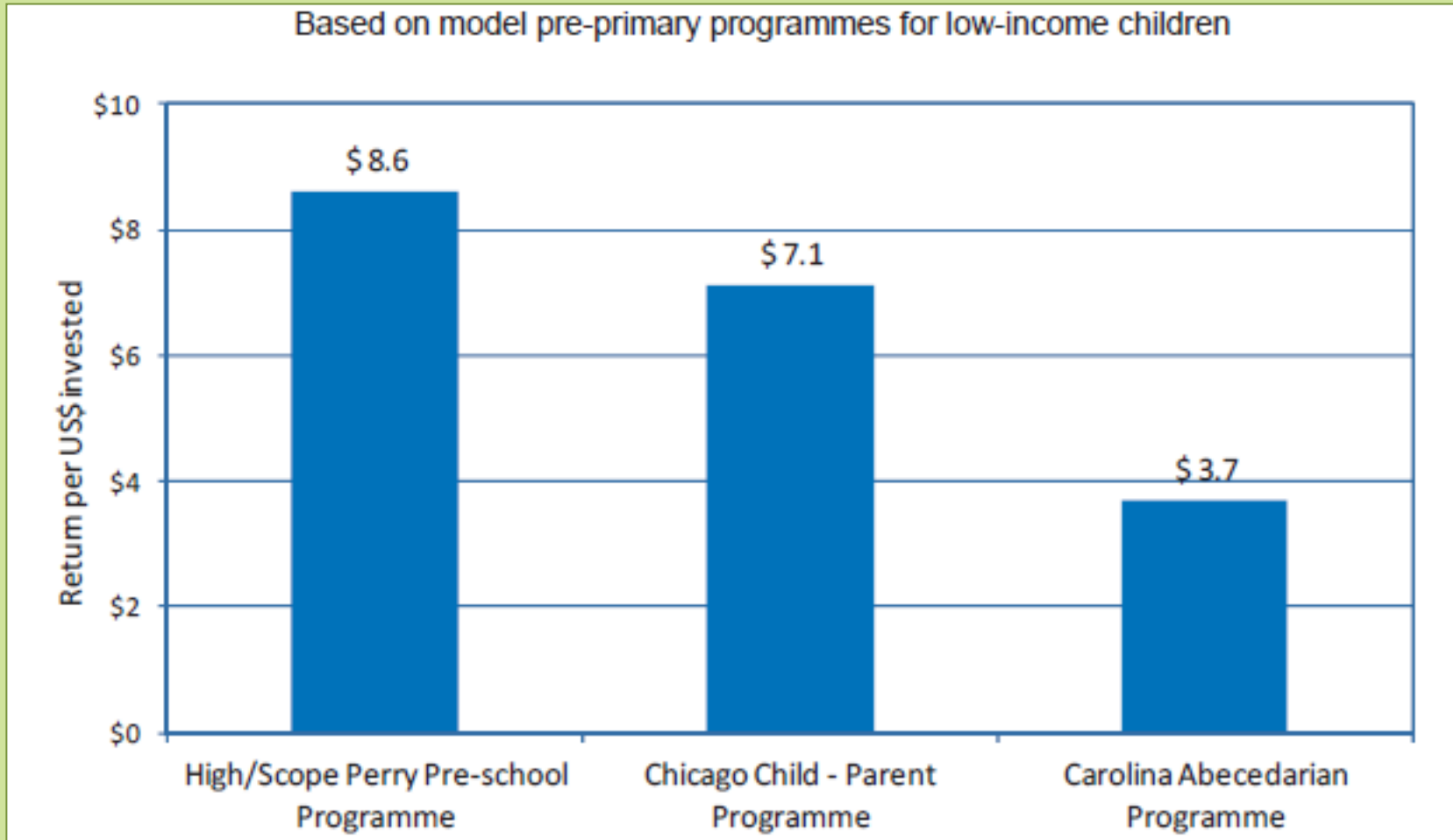
- 'IQ-boost' appeared to be temporary
- Health, self-esteem, motivation
- Less referrals to special education, less grade repetition, later outflow, more diplomas (although gap with average youth was never bridged)
- After school-leaving: more employment, less delinquency, less teenage pregnancy, less dependency on social protection
- Each invested dollar yields a return of \$7

An illustration: the Perry Preschool Programme



Source: Schweinhart & Montie (2004)

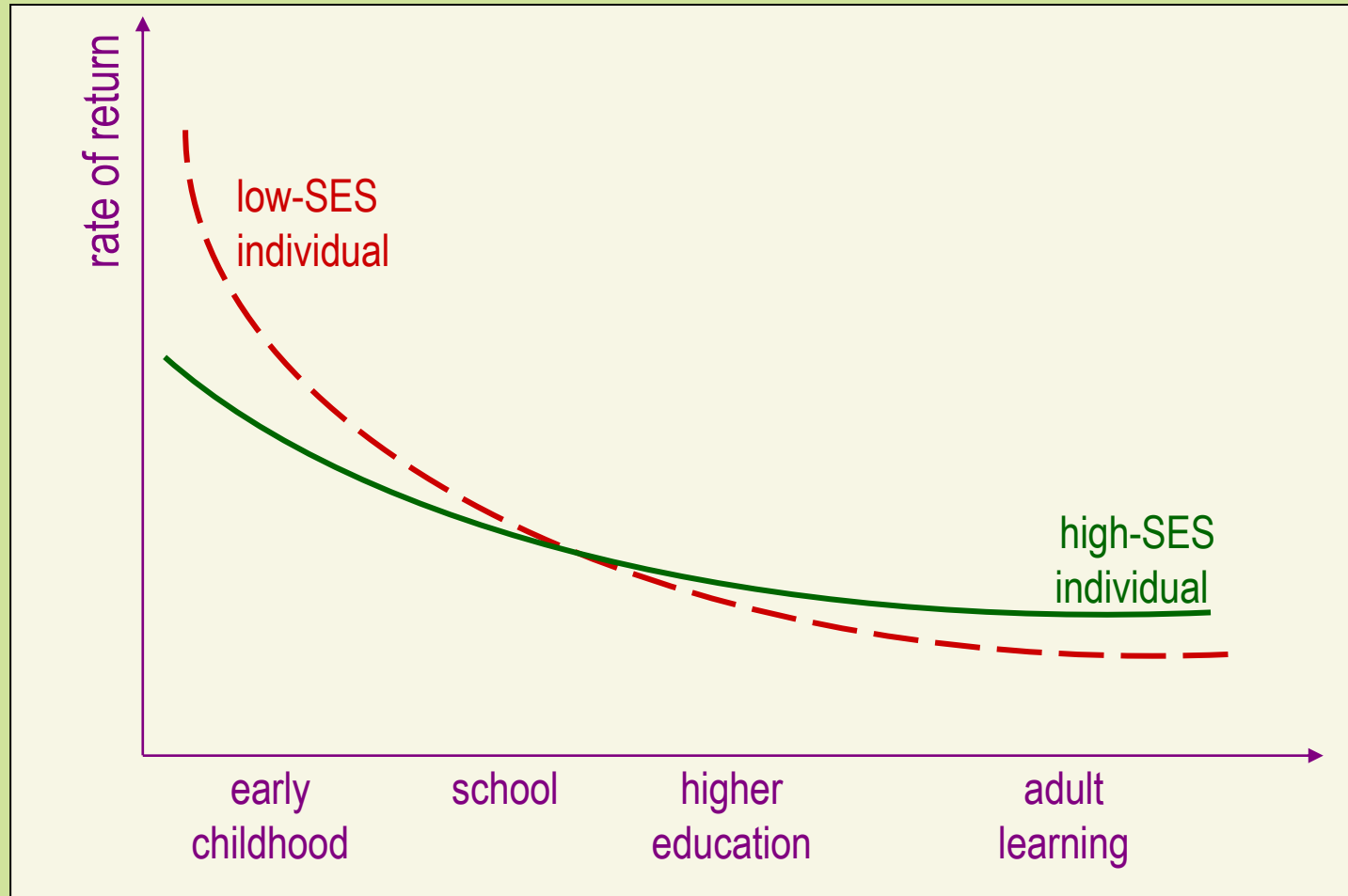
Returns per US\$ invested in Head Start



Question 1: cost-benefit analysis

- Transferability from American to European contexts?
 - Different institutional settings in ECEC
 - Different targeting
 - Even among disadvantaged populations: different patterns of poverty
 - different patterns of inequality (\Rightarrow rates of return on education)
 - Different crime rates
 - Different systems of social protection
- Indirect effects (via parental labour supply)

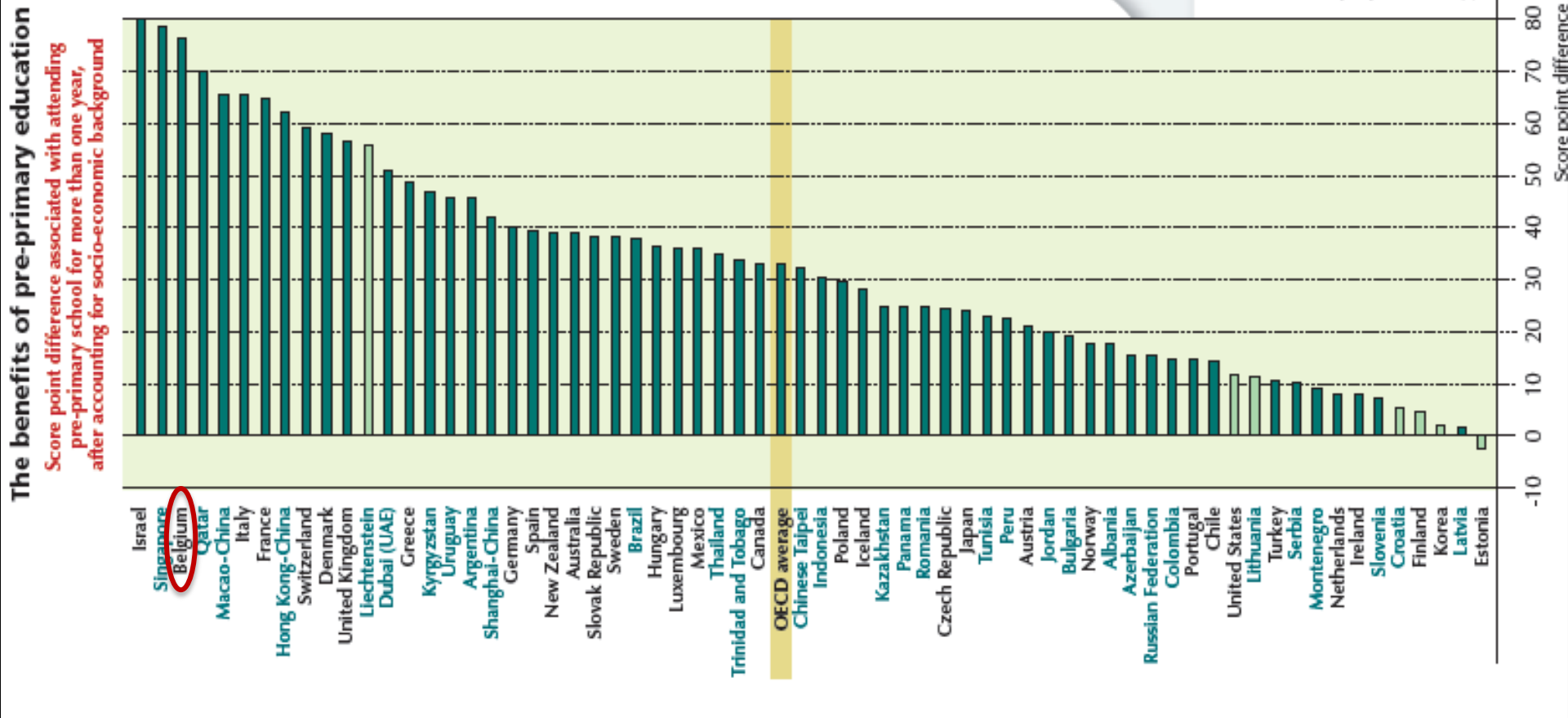
Rates of return by level of education and social background



Source: Woessmann et al., 2006 – based on Cunha, Heckman et al. (2006)

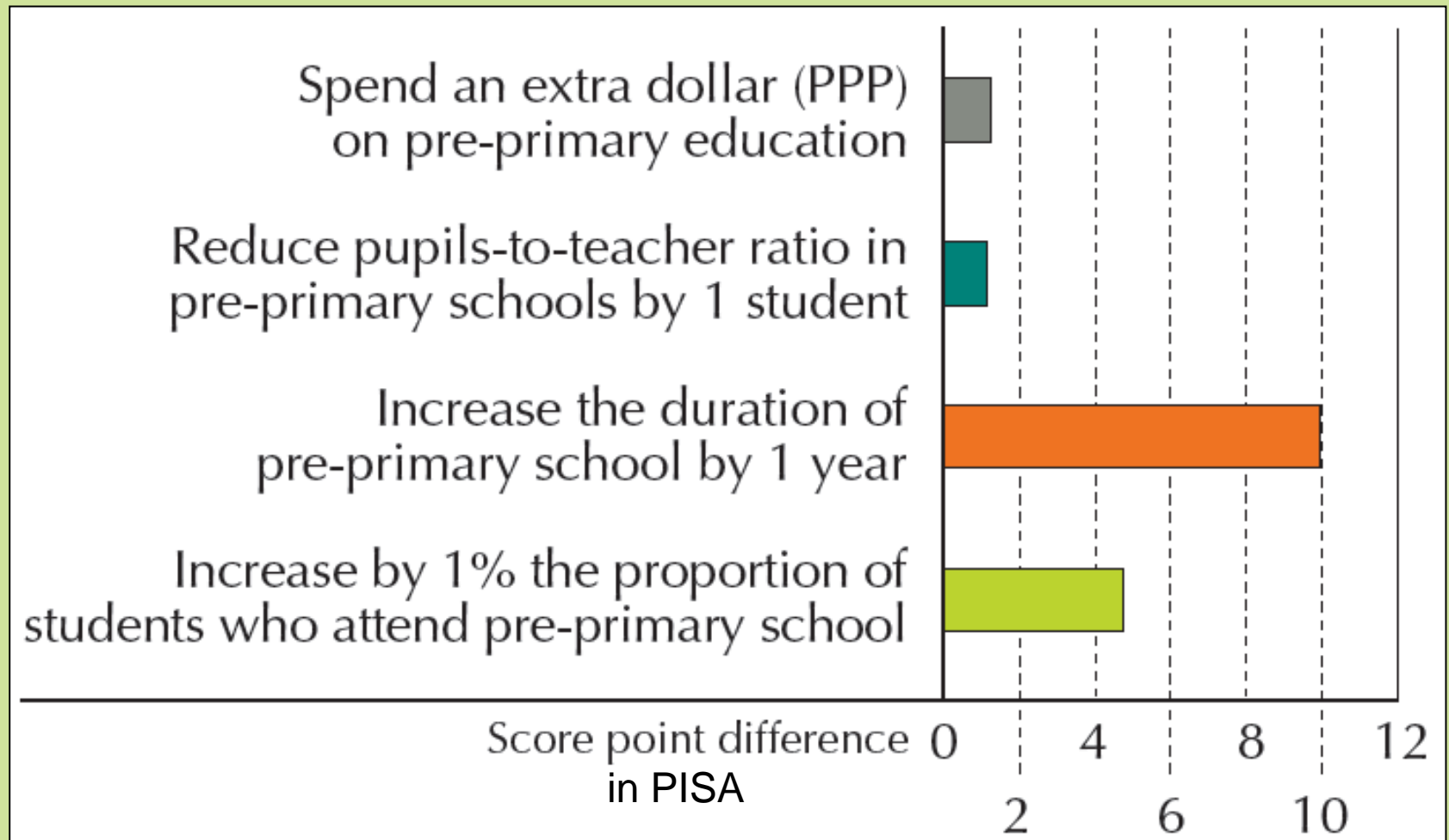
What about other countries? Evidence from PISA

Note: score point difference of 39 at age 15 ~1 year of education



Source: OECD, PISA in Focus 2011/1

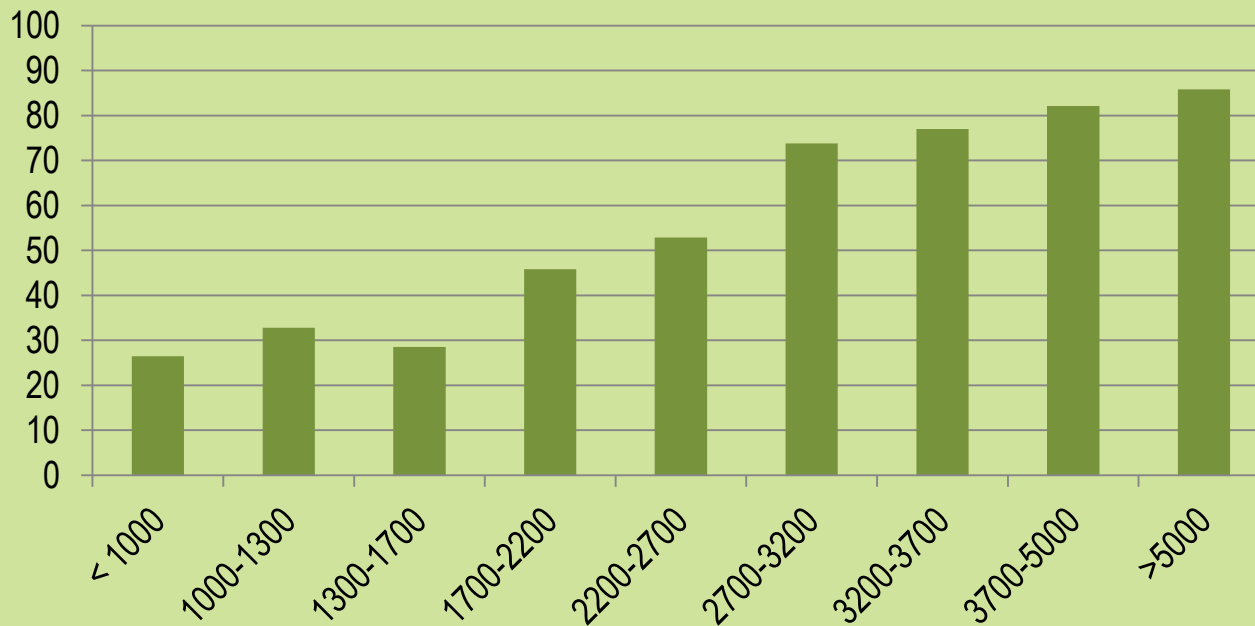
Average gain (at age 15) from ECEC in systems that...



Source: OECD, PISA in Focus 2011/1

Question 2: unequal access to ECEC

The Matthew effect in ECEC: children who would benefit most tend to participate least.
Example: probability of use of child care (%) by monthly income (€) in Flanders



Poor families: 30.7% ⇔ non-poor: 73.4%

Non-Belgian mothers: 40.7% ⇔ Belgian 77.9%

Potential explanations for unequal use of ECEC

Unequal opportunities (exogenous influences):

- Material conditions (income, costs, family size, distance, degree of subsidisation, income-related price setting, ...)
- Link between use of ECEC and labour market participation
- Human, social and cultural capital: pedagogical skills & awareness of parents, 'maturity' of children, sense of belonging, ...)

Unequal treatment (endogenous barriers / discrimination):

- Priority rules: dual-earner families, regular attendance conditions...
- De facto discrimination in leave schemes
- Unequal quality: formal vs informal care
- Cultural barriers
- Quasi-market mechanisms

Strategies for more inclusive ECEC

- Equal opportunity strategies
 - Free provision, means-testing
 - Outreaching
 - Compulsory participation (preschool)
- Equal treatment strategies
 - Legal entitlement
 - Legal quality standards
 - Parental involvement
 - Intercultural (training of) staff
- Equal outcomes strategies
 - Targeted programmes
 - Positive action within mainstream provision (single-parent families, low-income families, at-risk children)
 - Additional services (health care, language stimulation)

Quasi-markets in ECEC

Quasi-markets:

- free choice of services
- free provision of services
- govt = 3rd payer
- subsidy / child

Competition based on 'reputation'

- Quality of services
- Quality of intake

⇒ quality ↗ ⇔ inequality ↗

Secondary segment:

'natural' initial disadvantage
⇒ low demand ⇒ less possibility
of selection / poorer funding
⇒ weak quality
⇒ vicious circle

Primary segment:

'natural' initial advantage
⇒ high demand ⇒ possibility
of selective admission / better funding
⇒ strong reputation
⇒ virtuous circle

Question 3: the role of ECEC in breaking cycles of disadvantage

- E.g. child poverty action plan in Flanders:
 - Objective: halving child poverty by 2020
 - Main focus on ECEC
 - ⇔ ECEC does not prevent child poverty: it may at best prevent the persistence of poverty across the life cycle
- Prevention of child poverty necessitates investment in young (and future) parents
 - Prevention of early school leaving: risk of child poverty is 5 times higher when mother has dropped out from secondary education
 - Youth Guarantee Scheme
 - ⇔ Belgian government has tightened conditionality of social protection for young people

Conclusion: need for two-generation strategies

