

Child wellbeing and early childhood education across the OECD

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Early Childhood Education and Childcare (ECE) is high on the policy agenda in many European OECD countries

What are the policy goals sought from ECE?

- Raising female labour force participation and hence tax takes in the face of an ageing population
- Reconciling work and family for women (gender equity)
- Increasing low European fertility rates
- Integrating immigrant children from non-native cultures and language groups
- Enhancing child wellbeing
 - * for all children equally
 - * for disadvantaged children especially (reducing inter-generational inequality)

What does ECE do for children?

It can promote child wellbeing and child development

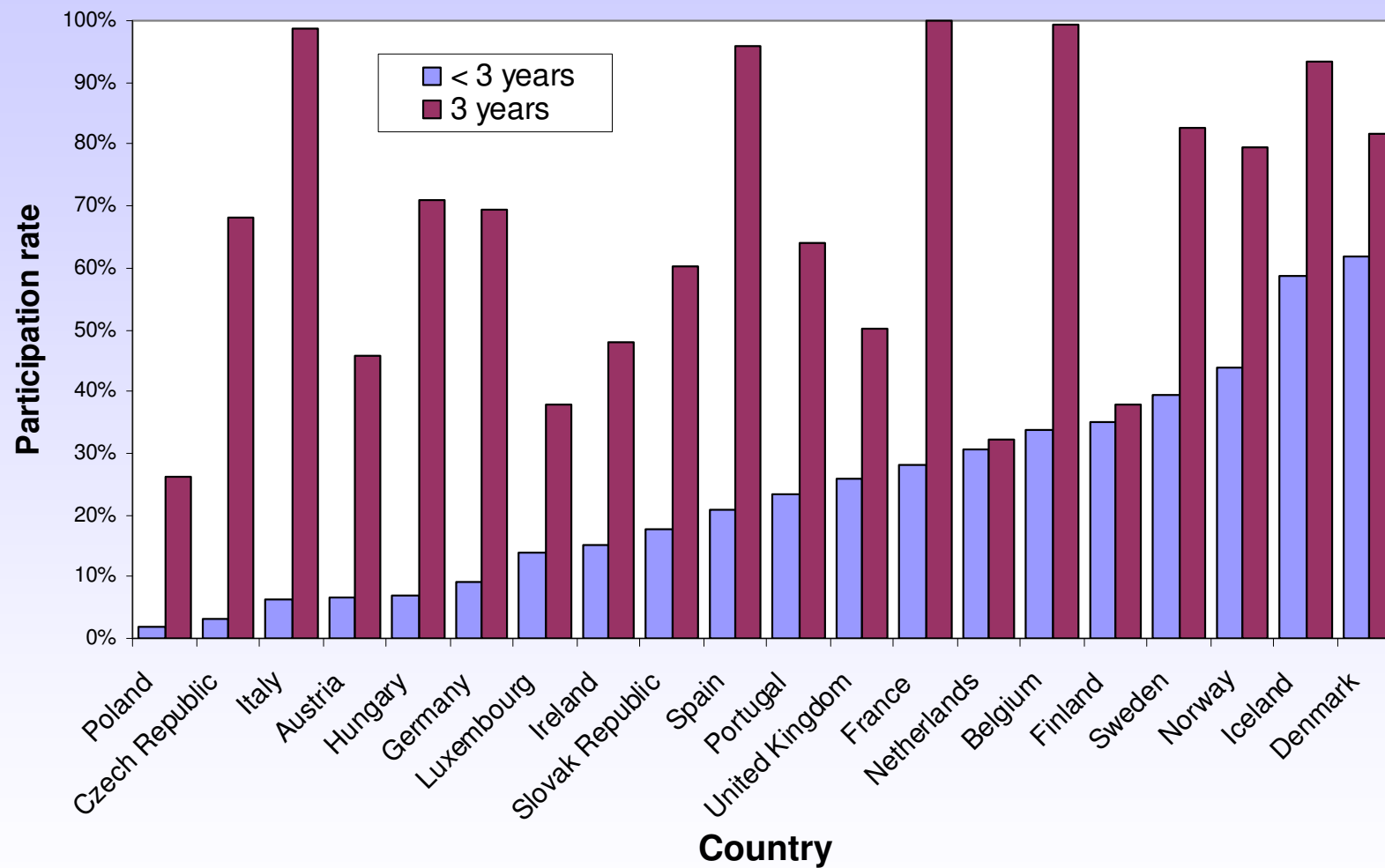
- foundational investment in social relationships and in learning to learn
- promote an active, healthy life style
- it can be fun, challenging and enjoyable for children

An rare opportunity to improve both efficiency and equity

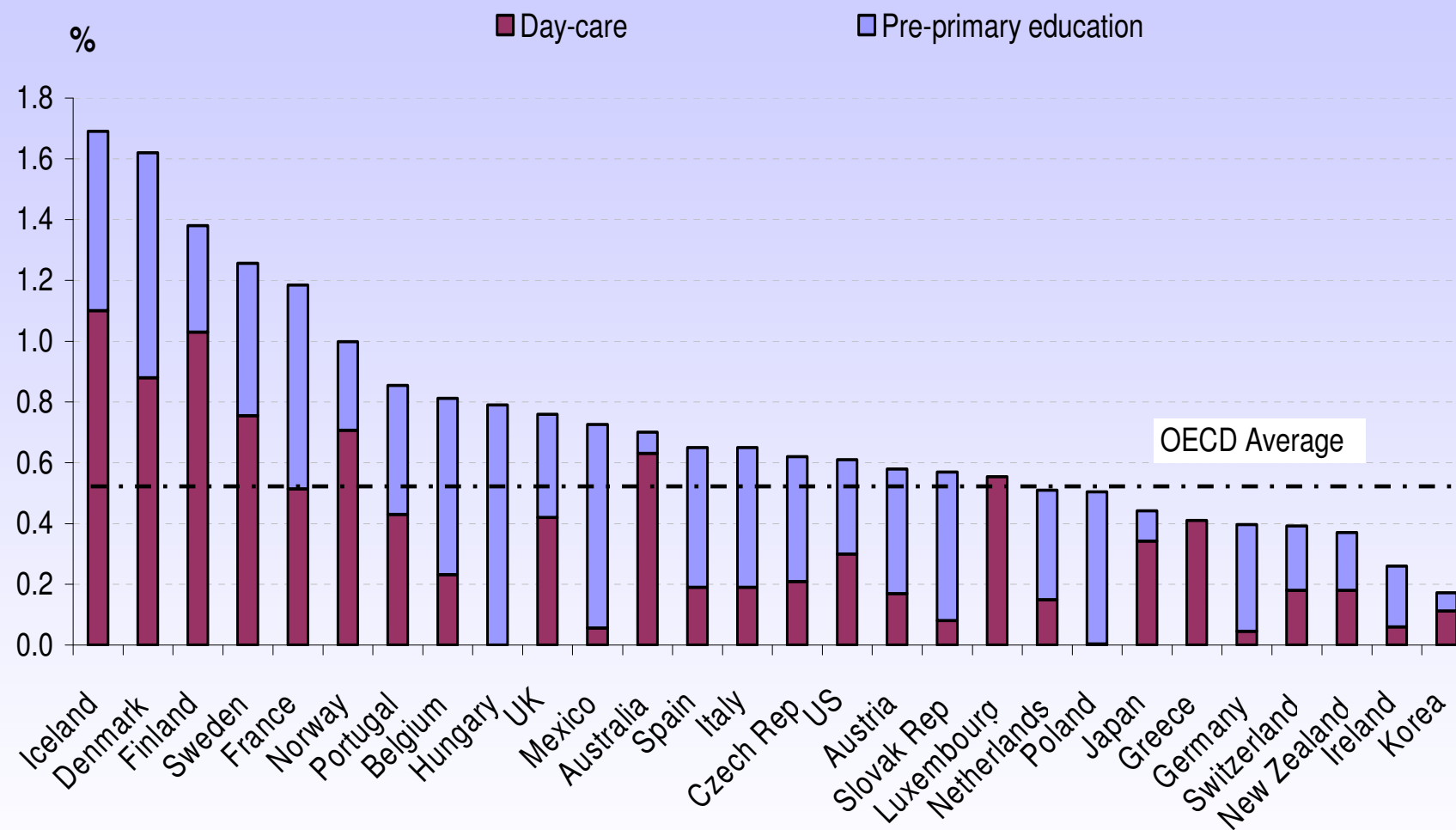
What is optimal for child wellbeing and development in terms of starting age?

- Depends on the individual child & parents
- How young is too young?
 - * < 18 months, generally not desirable
 - * 18 months-3 years, depends on quality of ECE relative to quality of child's home environment. On average small negative effects on illness/behaviour, small positive effects on IQ
 - * 3-5 years, generally desirable
- Desirable weekly hours increase with age of child
- Policies to promote ECE for fertility or work-life balance reasons may not always be best for child wellbeing and development

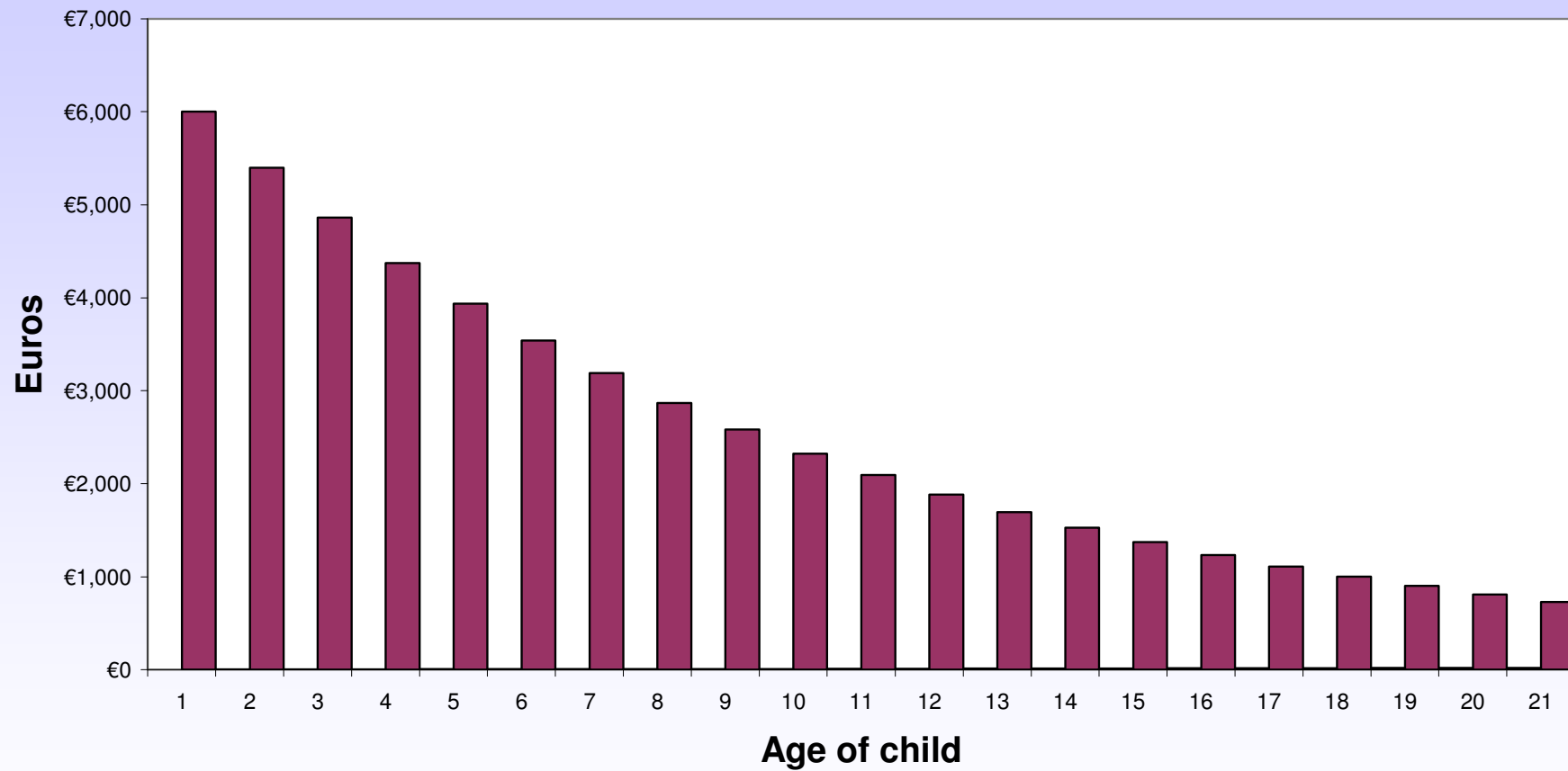
ECE Participation rates before and at age 3 years in OECD-Europe



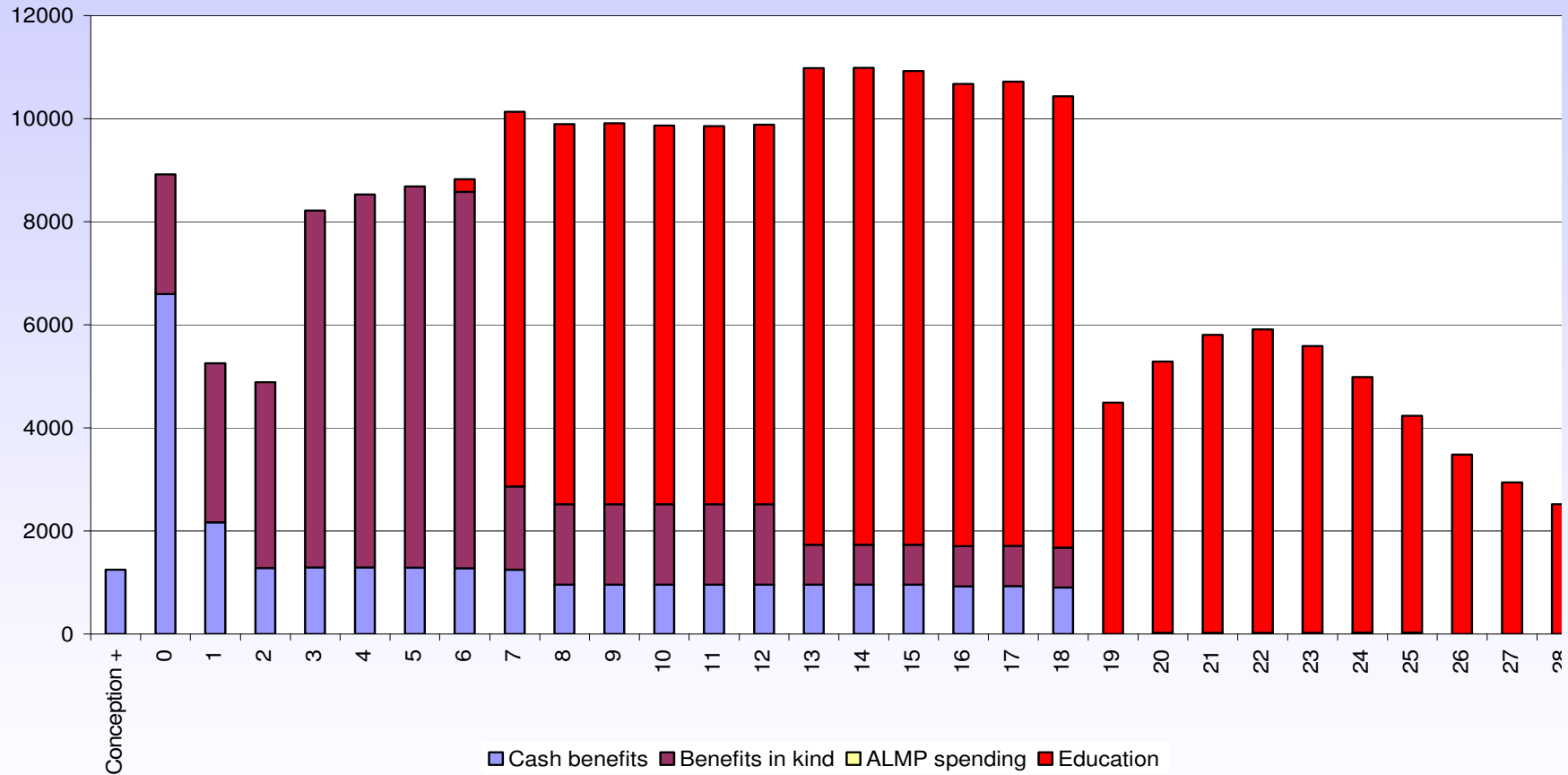
Public spending on childcare including pre-primary education, 2003



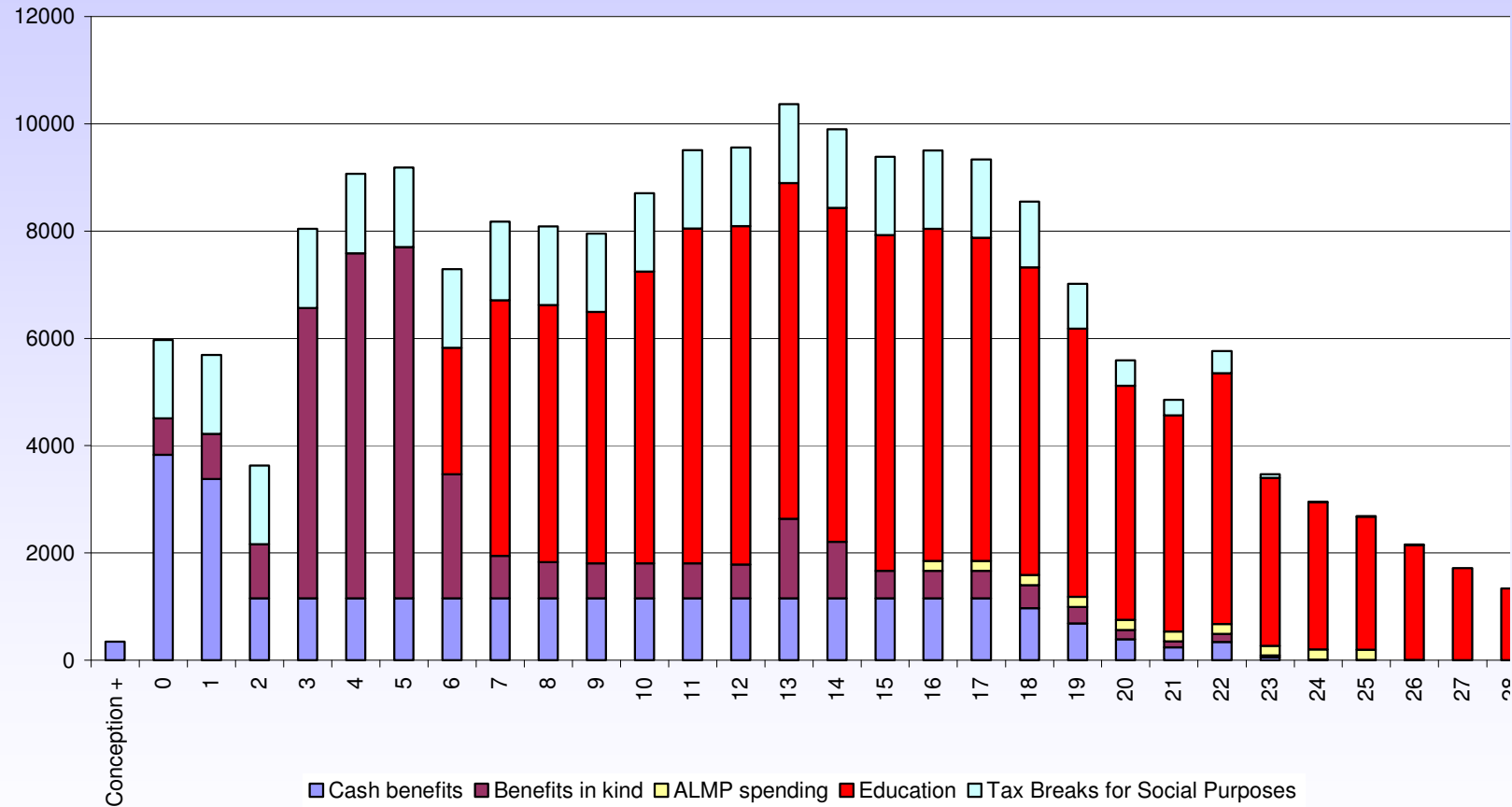
Stylised pattern of desirable investment in children - After Heckman



Sweden: Spending by year of age (PPP\$ per capita)



Germany: Spending by year of age (PPP\$ per capita)



Key policy messages

- ECE has multiple objectives, including child wellbeing and development
- Child wellbeing should be central but is too often subordinated to other policy goals
- ECE should combat obesity and offer physical opportunities, as well as socialise and educate
- Governments should transfer resources from post-compulsory education pre-compulsory education to get around the efficiency-equity trade-off
- To provide incentives for quality, design ECE funding so:
 - a) parents can chose providers
 - b) government funding follows the child

Key policy messages, contd

- Universal and targeted provision of ECE is not an either/or
- Provide universal high quality ECE and;
- Provide more intensive ECE to sweep up all children from disadvantaged environments
- Conditional cash transfers to encourage ECE participation?
- ECE is not a social cure-all (UK Millennium Cohort results show social gradients in learning have emerged by age three)
- Hence family level interventions before and after age 3 years (benefits and services in-kind) need to be coordinated with ECE

Some follow-up references:

Babies and Bosses, OECD, Paris. (does not include DE)

Starting Strong I and II, OECD, Paris. (on ECE)

OECD Family data base:

www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database