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Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe

# ESL in Hungary and in Poland

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School Leaving  
in Europe

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# POLAND

# Education reform in Poland

The major education reform in 1999 affected:

- the school structure - the system was modernized - restructuring of the system which expanded general schooling
- the curricula

# Improving academic outcomes - Poland's significant improvements in international achievement tests

- delaying tracking → delayed vocational streaming
- extending students' exposure to a general academic education
- increasing their time on task on basic competencies



delaying vocational education and increasing time on task have a positive and significant impact on student performance

Elements of the design of the educational system 'immunise' Poland against a high ESL rate:

- lack of selectivity
- a long cycle of general education
- compulsory education until age 18
- well developed second-chance schools
- compulsory in-service teacher training
- the prevalence of upper secondary and tertiary education
- institutional solutions also provide support for students with special educational needs or students with behavioural problems



These systemic arrangements – combined with high educational aspirations, the belief in the value of education and its importance for upward social mobility, and the undoubted benefits resulting from holding a higher education diploma – have created a favourable climate for raising the level of education of the Polish society

# Changes since 2016

The establishment of lower secondary schools and the resulting extension of common general education to nine school years are often seen as the major reason explaining the significant improvement of PISA results in Poland



Surprisingly, this improvement did not affect the popular view that Polish schools offered poor education and that the education reforms introduced over the past 15 years were not successful:

*“This opinion strikingly runs counter to any evidence collected from international and national studies that suggests the opposite – that the lower secondary schools are probably the strongest part of the system. . . . This contradiction between evidence, expert views and the popular opinion is key to understanding the recent proposal for reforms of the present government” (Białecki, Jakubowski, & Wiśniewski, 2017, p. 8).*

# Changes since 2016

Internal criticism of the educational system

- lowering of school age
- aversion to external exams that may lead to test-driven education
- poor evaluation of the functioning of lower secondary schools was used in the last election by the current government headed by the conservative Law and Justice party.



Currently, since 2016, a reform has been implemented, restoring the structure of education from the period of the Polish People's Republic and introducing a new curriculum at each educational stage

# (Missing) ESL policy in Poland

One of the lowest ESL rates among EU countries (about 5.5%) → one of the best performing countries which have already achieved the EU benchmark (10%)



- this positive result is not caused by deliberate action
- there are no specific policies
- no single, comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem of early leaving from education and training as defined at European level
- the problem is addressed indirectly through other policies and programmes concerning education and young people



ESL is seen as a 'European problem: not directly related to the situation of the country, where the low level of ESL is presented as strong point of the education system

# (Missing) ESL policy in Poland

There is no comprehensive strategy for preventing ESL



Interestingly, the rationale for the lack of an education policy specifically directed towards ESL is justified by the argument that the main priority is to provide education for all rather than focus on measures addressed to specific at-risk groups, which is somehow different from the dominant European discourse:

*„We could teach the EU to put less emphasis on those groups that are already outside the system and vulnerable groups which are almost lost. Better and faster results can be achieved by investing in those who are still at school and do everything so they do not suddenly stop. What saves us is not a high level of services for the ones at risk, but the fact that we have a common system of education for all children.”*  
(policy maker at state level)

# ESL and NEET

Lowest ESL rates in Europe - Poland set up its own national goal to decrease its level to 4.5% by 2020

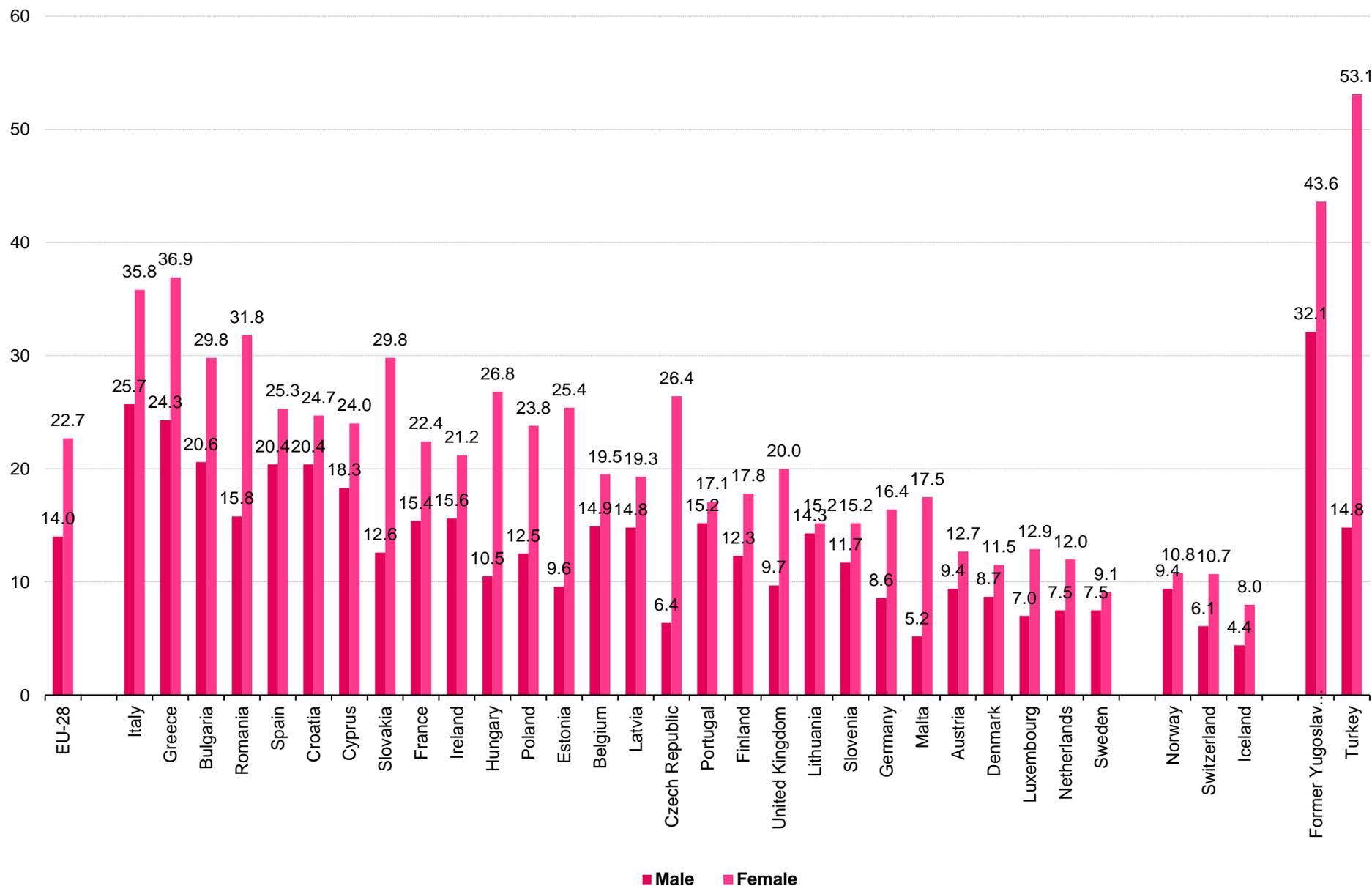
The rate of persons not in education, employment or training (NEETs) → three times higher (15.5% in 2015)

Polish educational and social policy makers face a challenge:

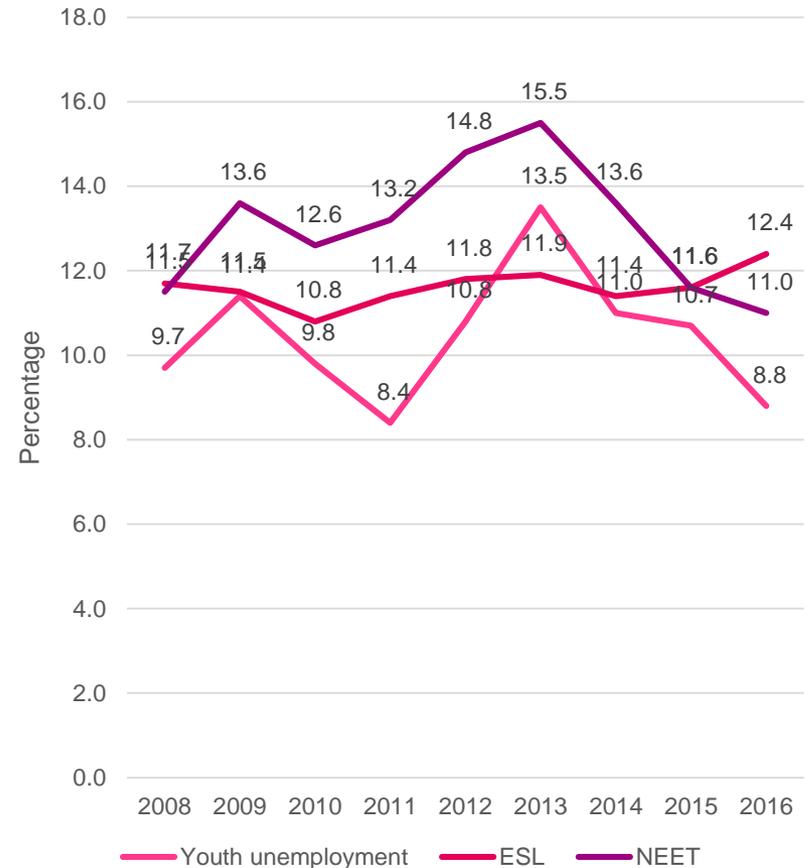
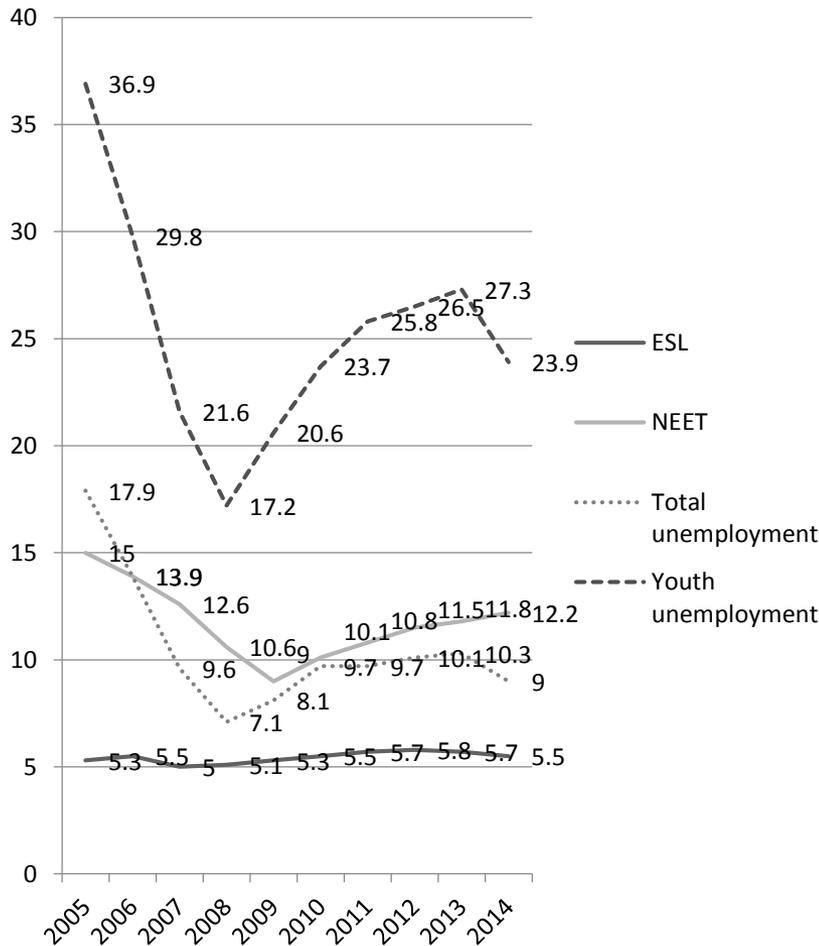
➤ youth unemployment is higher than the EU average:

- since 2008 it was steadily increasing until 2013 - 27.3%
- in 2014 the percentage was lower: 23.9%

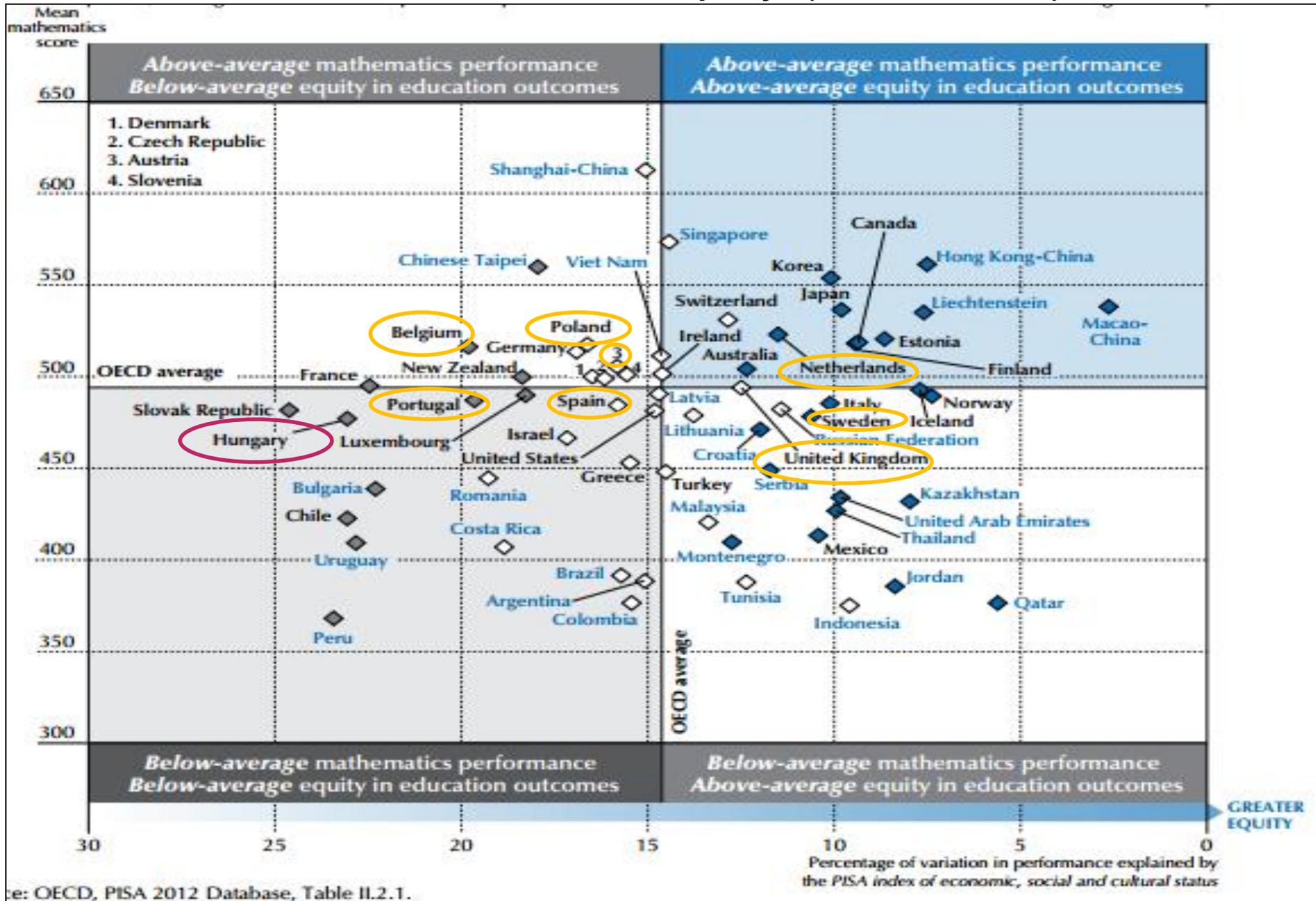
## Share of young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex, 2016



# ESL, NEET, total unemployment and youth unemployment rates in Poland and in Hungary (Source: Eurostat)



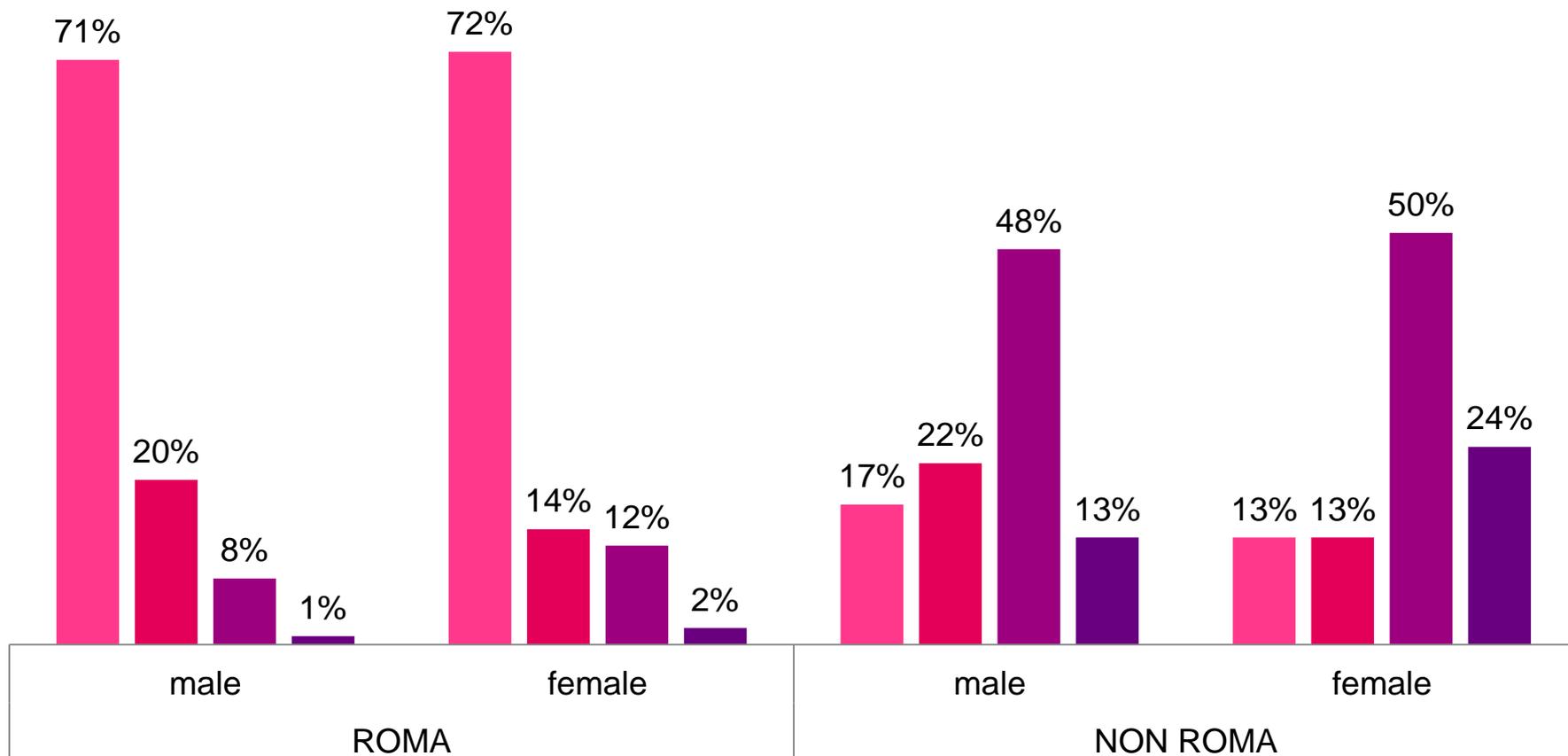
# Performance and Equity (PISA 2012)



# HUNGARY

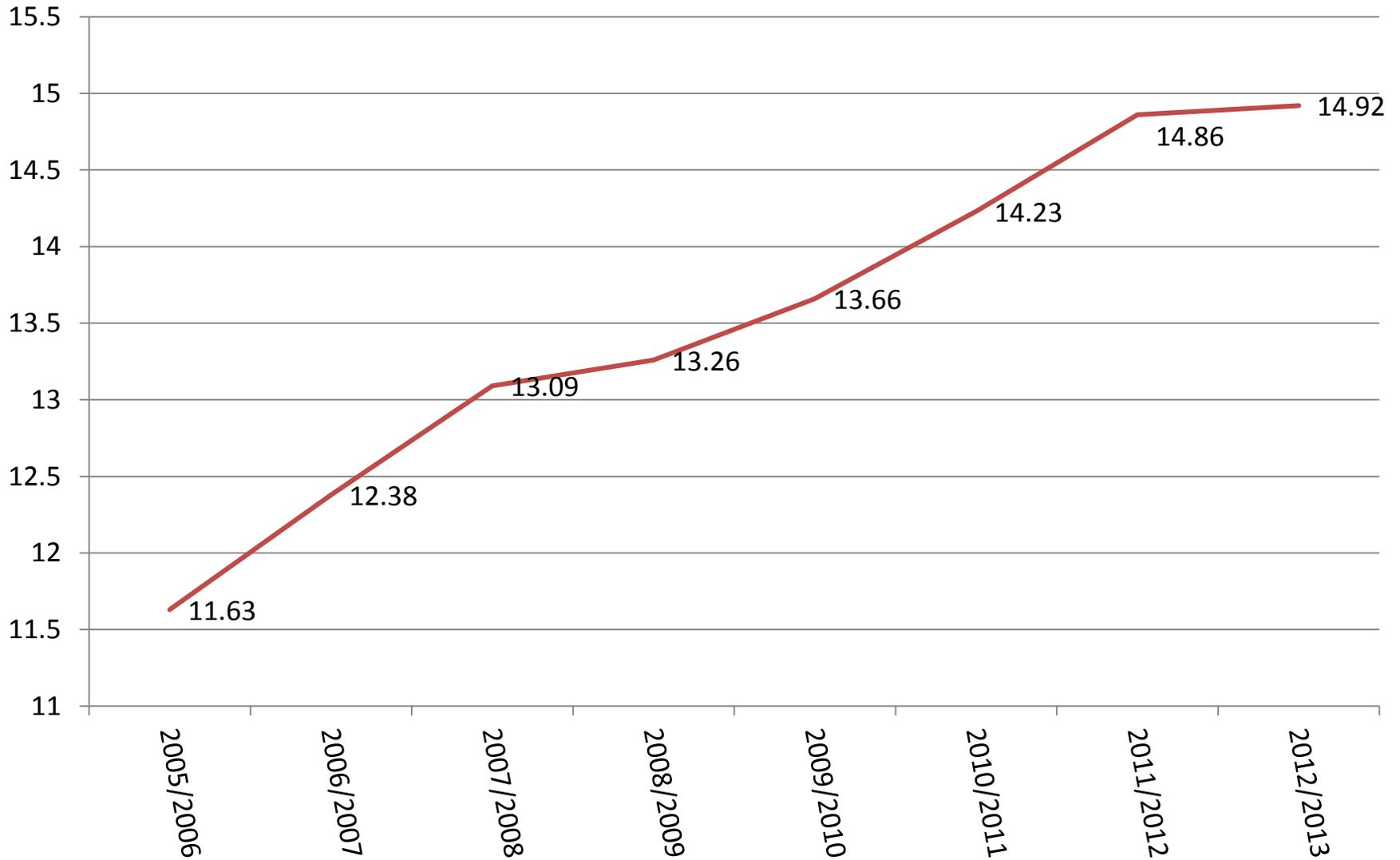
# Educational levels of 20-29 years old by ethnicity and gender

■ primary or less ■ vocational ■ high school (A level) ■ tertiary



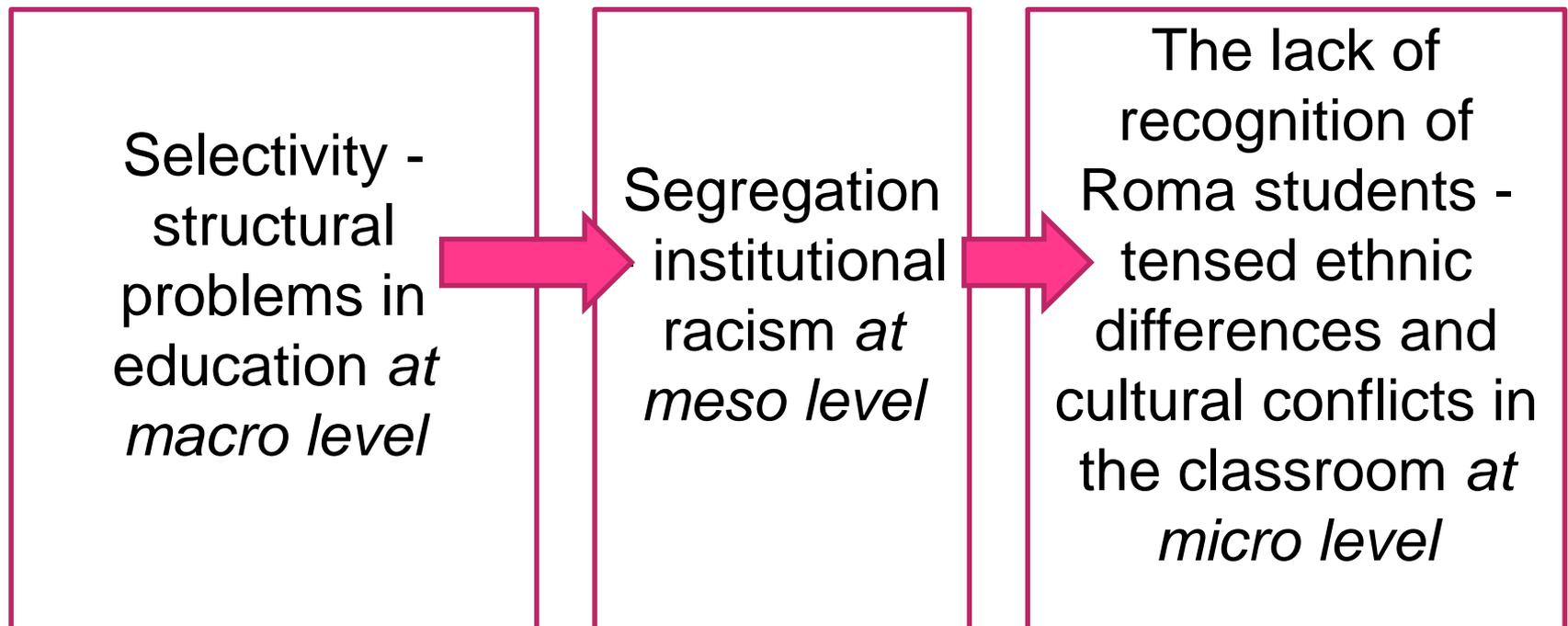
# Share of Roma students in primary schools

(estimation by the Ministry of Educaiton, 2013)



## II. From the structural inequalities to personal exclusion in education

How does the personal meet the structural on the losing side?



# Selectivity leads to segregation

- free choice of school – „white flight”
- early selection among students - students can enter the general secondary school track at the 5th or the 7th grades as well
- increasing number of religious schools - church schools are chosen by middle-class families or by the local elite groups, while Roma children attend the ever more abandoned public schools

# Cultural, social and ethnic conflicts in the classroom

- Lack of personalised ways of instruction and individualised support by observing the students' needs
- The lack of recognition of Roma students' ethnic identity – no respect
- „Blaming the victim” - teachers' approach: the problems of low-performing students are the responsibility of the families

Roma students are hopelessly left behind, and the generated vicious circle sooner or later throws them to a segregated arrangement

# School segregation locks Roma students into a prison of disadvantages

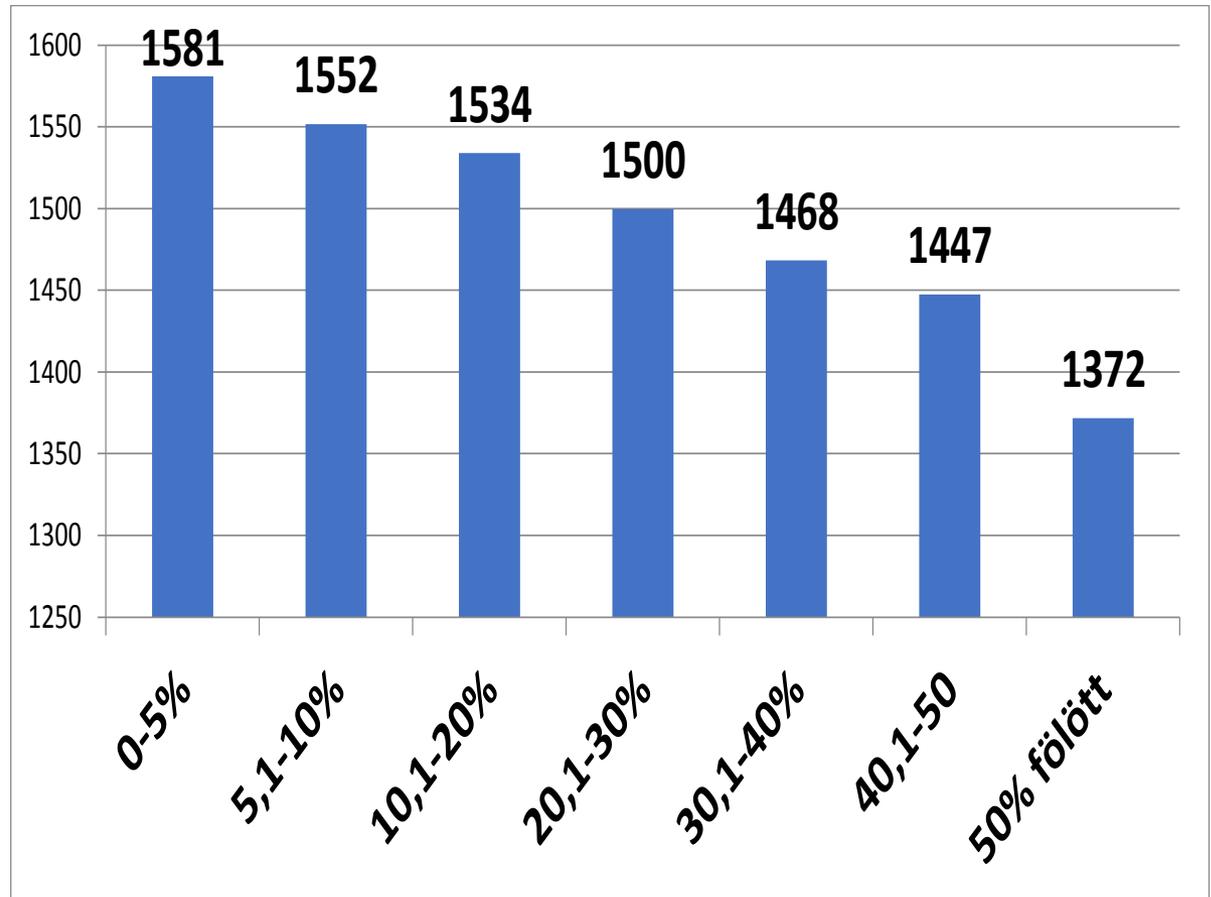
Roma students attending socially diverse schools tend to go on to higher education in much larger numbers than their peers who attend schools in a homogenous group of Roma children (Fox-Vidra 2013, Kertesi-Kézdi 2013a, b, Havas-Zolnay 2011)



„Ghetto schools” represent the extreme cases of segregated school with more than 80 per cent of Roma (and poor) students among their student population - more than 10 per cent of the schools are segregated Roma schools

## Reading skills in schools by the estimated share of Roma students (2015)

The National Assessment of Basic Competencies (National ABC) measures the abilities of students in reading and mathematical literacy in grades 6, 8 and 10 in every school



# Forms of ethnic segregation

Ethnic segregation in education takes place on two levels:

- **Inter-school segregation** – certain schools have a student body predominantly from Roma families; (Over 10% of Roma students attend a school where they form a majority in the school). **Data focus only on this type**
- **Intra-school segregation** – parallel classes within the school have students with highly divergent ethnic composition, resulting in certain classes attended predominantly by Roma students (while others have no or just 1-2 Roma student).

# Consequences of segregation for Roma students

- Roma students' everyday experience of being 'othered';
- Teachers' lack of awareness and professional skill to navigate in a socially and ethnically diverse classroom – they feel they don't have the tools and blame and punish the Roma and socially disadvantaged kids;
- Teachers' differential treatment of Roma students;
- Lack of meaningful interethnic relations; hostility among students along ethnic lines:
  - Roma students' strategy of coping:
    - ❖ either internalize racialized perceptions of being inferior
  - OR
  - ❖ break the norm and develop anti-schooling attitudes: high truancy, high share of early school leavers

# III. How do life chances of a non-Roma and a Roma student differ from each other?

## Early childhood

### Roma child

it is almost unthinkable that they go to any kind of day-care under the age of three.

*According to researches, if disadvantaged children can participate in high quality early childhood intervention services, those have positive impact on their life chances.*

*(Magnuson et al. 2007, Sylvia et al. 2004)*

### Non Roma child

They have a good chance to receiving early childhood services already before the kindergarten, as working mothers' babies are much more likely to be accepted by nursery institutions.

# Kindergarten (preschool)

A Roma child has a good chance to share daily life with non-Roma peers, as the phenomenon of 'white flight' is not as strong at this level as at the school level

\*The most segregated village schools become segregated because of the massive flow of 'white flight' and not because of the rate of Roma population of the village

# Primary and lower secondary school – the first 8 grades

## Roma student

Roma students have more than a fair chance to live in a village and to attend a segregated ghetto school

Because of the high grade retention rate quite probably they complete it in more than 8 years or never at all

As the compulsory age of education today is 16 years, Roma student will, at best, legally finish the primary and the lower secondary schools, without ever entering the higher secondary level

## Non Roma student

Following years in the kindergarten, especially the middle or upper middle class non-Roma children have much better opportunities to get into a school in which the added pedagogical value is above the average, so any deficiencies of their circumstances will be even further compensated by the school

# The upper secondary level

## Roma student

They will most likely to apply for vocational school – the risky point to become ESL

## Non Roma student

They will apply to a general or a vocational secondary school, from where they have a better chance to apply for higher education

They have a significant chance not to have any Roma classmates or schoolmates during their entire school career or at the secondary level, especially in general secondary schools

# IV. The risky point of becoming ESL: the vocational school

**At the institutional level -  
increased risk of dropping out**

**Inflexibility:**

- ❖ Within the different tracks at the secondary level (vocational, general vocational, general secondary)
- ❖ Within the different vocational trainings

**Due to the low quality of the vocational training:**

- ❖ hard to continue further studies
- ❖ hard to get an adequate job

**At the student level – feeling  
hopelessness**

**Graduating from vocational school is not a solution:**

- ❖ no work
- or
- ❖ work with very low salary

**Strong labor-market  
discrimination:**

- ❖ decreases the motivation for getting a degree

**After school programs:**

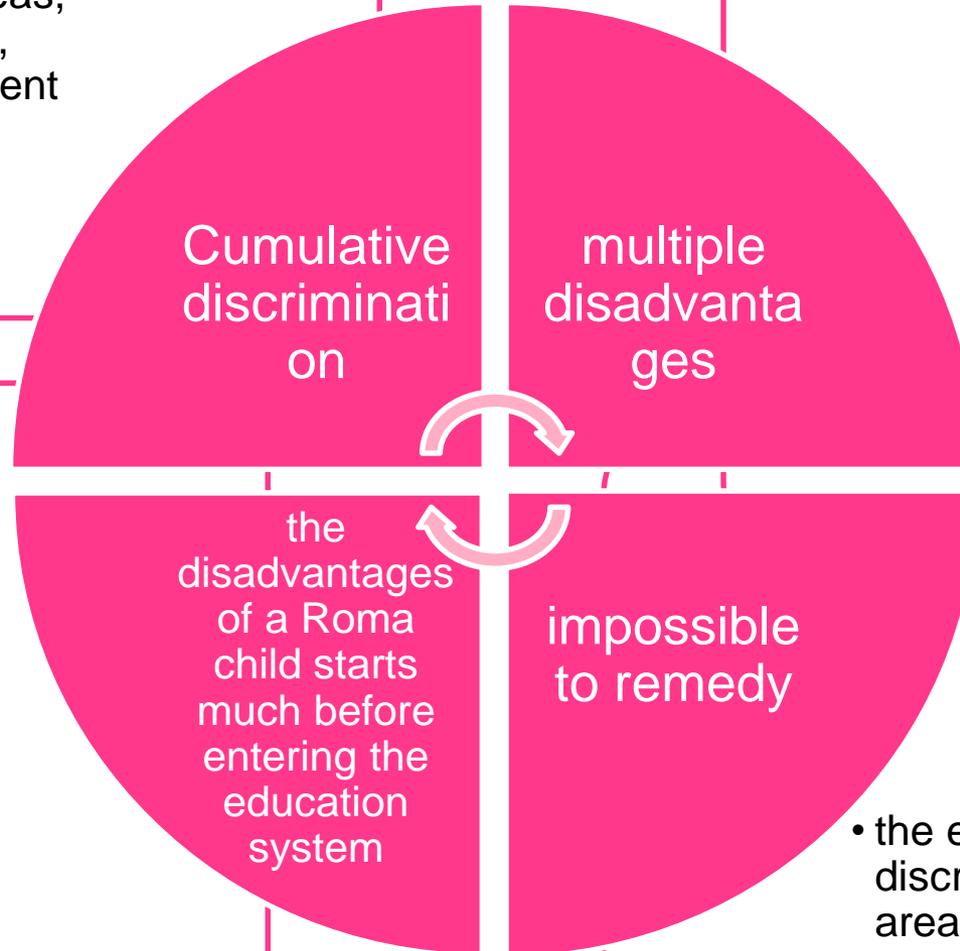
- ❖ few - no significant impact on dropout

# Conclusion

- involving many areas, such as education, housing, employment and health care

- housing segregation, for instance, is accompanied, among other disadvantages, by access to very poor quality schools and the lack of early childhood care institutions

- the disadvantaged life chances of Roma children are determined from almost the very first moment of their lives, and they differ sharply from the conditions of the middle-class non-Roma children



- the elimination of discrimination in one area does not result in improvements in other areas