



# **ESPN Thematic Report on Social Investment Turkey 2015**

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**EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)**

**ESPN Thematic Report on  
Social Investment  
Turkey**

**2015**

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## Summary

In Turkey's fragmented and under-funded social policy framework, social investment does not appear to have a serious impact on society. Ongoing efforts to reform the social policy programmes do not explicitly refer to social investment either.

Turkey has low enrolment in pre-primary schooling for 4-6 year olds and performs even worse in providing childcare for 0-3 year olds. Available facilities are crowded with an average child-to-staff ratio of around 20. Although there is an intention to increase coverage, adequate resources are not channelled into early childcare and education. Instead, the government attempts to increase coverage by switching from full-day to half-day pre-primary education.

It should be noted that there are problems in primary, secondary and tertiary education as well. Compulsory education has only recently been extended to 12 years (from 8 years, in 2012) and hence the average education level of the labour force is rather low. The impact of the reform on average years of education will likely take years. The quality of education is low and classrooms are crowded. Life-long learning programs and training are rather limited, insufficient to compensate for a lack of education.

Poverty is prevalent among children, and current social assistance programmes are not adequate to raise households above the poverty threshold. There are programmes targeting children with a social investment perspective, such as conditional cash transfers, but these are limited and provide very limited support. Programmes to provide children with school materials may also be mentioned as an example of important but relatively small assistance programmes.

Lack of childcare and long-term care facilities play an important role in the low labour force participation of women. Although the government acknowledges the problem in various official documents and attempts to introduce policy measures to facilitate female employment, its conservative policies emphasizing women's role as caretakers work in the opposite direction.

Turkey has official maternal leave but no paternal leave. There is ongoing work to introduce a short paternal leave and to improve maternal leave.

A minimum income scheme is missing in Turkish social policy. Unemployment benefit has limited coverage and payment. Social services are rather limited. Despite recent improvements, active labour market policies reach a small portion of the population. Reforms aimed at improving these programmes have been in the planning for some time. Lack of resources appears to be a major obstacle. While major reforms are yet to be implemented, small steps are taken in various social policy programmes, such as social assistance to widowed women, new social service centres in South-eastern and Eastern provinces, etc.

That being said, we should note that official documents acknowledge most of these issues and plans are being made to implement programmes to address them. While some indicators have shown improvement, such as increasing school enrolment following the reforms, in most areas progress has been so far marginal.

## 1 Assessment of the overall approach to social investment

When evaluating Turkey's social investment policies in general, and childhood development policies in particular, one should consider that (compared to EU countries) (i) Turkey's income per capita figure is very low, (ii) income and wealth distributions are unequal, (iii) informality is high, and (iv) the ratio of social investments to GDP is low. The extrapolation from these four points is twofold: there is a large portion of the population in need of social assistance and the financial resources allocated to social policies are inadequate, both of which is visible in the statistics. At the macro level, the government does not seem to be willing to engage with the problems of income and wealth distribution and informality, despite the fact that the implications are of great importance for social investment. Furthermore, the entire social assistance system in Turkey appears to be very fragmented, and most social investment policies are not based on the right principles.

The first problem appears to be the high rate of poverty among children. Evaluating the background of this problem, one notices the following vicious circle: poor families (both in absolute and in relative terms) are finding it hard to provide high quality education for their children, who when grown will have a low human capital and thus be prone to remaining poor. The main reason is that poor families are likely to find themselves with no choice to send their boys to work (most likely in the informal sector); girls on the other hand are kept at home to look after the new-born or the aged/disabled members of the family (as well as because of conservative values). The low level of enrolment in education among children coming from poor families testifies to this. Although the government is aiming to increase the enrolment ratio, the current methods raise fears that this may be achieved through lowering the quality of education, which is already quite low, such as, for example, switching from full-day to half-day schooling. This picture replicates itself in the entire education system: apart from a small percentage, most education units are ill-equipped to provide a high-quality service. Although there is a huge gap between the demand for and the supply of university education in Turkey, some newly-established public universities operate under-capacity (student-wise), which testifies to the gaps in the level of quality at the higher education level.

The second problem is labour market exclusion, which has two dimensions: the first one is the high unemployment rate which fluctuates around 10% over the decade despite the high growth performance of the country, indicating a structural problem that needs to be targeted. The government does little to question this structural problem, but rather tries to provide patchy solutions. The second dimension, on the other hand, emerges from the very low rate of female labour participation (at 27%, compared to 65% for males according to Turkstat), which brings with it a set of adverse implications. Apart from the fact that a large portion of women are dependent on their husbands/parents, these families' budgets are limited to the earnings of husbands—which makes it difficult to address the poverty issue especially for low-income families. The government's philosophy for dealing with long-term/disabled care by providing an incentive to families who accept to give such services appears to be serious constraint to increasing the female labour force participation rate. Furthermore, it is feared that a family-based caring service may also apply a negative pressure on the policy of increasing the enrolment rates of children, as they—and especially girls—will be forced by their families to look after the elderly and the disabled members of the family. An additional dimension that keeps some women at home is the lack of parental service centres, and currently there does not seem to be a government initiative to address this problem.

The third problem is the overall nature of social assistance, the realm of which is dominated by the uncoordinated and patchy coexistence of mainly unconditional policy measures that grant entitlement to discretionary, irregular, means-tested cash or in-kind benefits (Yakut-Cakar et al., 2012). Although the government is known to be working on a reform that will address this problem (the main component of which is the introduction of a basic-income policy), so far there is no explicit commitment. The

current nature of the assistance is likely to introduce an element of unfairness into the system.

The fourth problem is the tendency of the government to interpret the exclusion problem mainly at the economic level. Although the economic dimension is likely to be the most important cause of social exclusion, there are many other reasons why some people/groups are excluded. Discrimination based on religious-affiliations, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, have an adverse effect of implicit and/or explicit exclusion, and inhibit the full participation of the affected groups in Turkish society and the labour market. Public policy rooted in religious or ethnic-based ideology weakens the social fabric and societal cohesion of the country. And finally, the government's attempts at blocking freedom of expression, one example of which is the increased pressure on the media, excludes individuals with dissenting views.

A separate remark is the extent of adaptability of social investment policies in times of major economic crises. The overall evaluation indicates that the government has no contingency plans for reshaping these policies should the economy be hit badly, other than passing references to the need for stimulating the economy.<sup>1</sup>

## **2 Assessment of specific policy areas and measures/ instruments**

### **2.1 Support for early childhood development**

#### **2.1.1 Early childhood education:**

In Turkey enrolment in pre-primary education is rather low. According to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2014), among 3-5 year olds the rate was 27.71% in the 2013-2014 school year (42.54% among 5 year olds, 37.46% among 4-5 year olds). The rate was similar for both girls and boys. In primary school the rate goes up to 99.57%, but falls to 76.65% in secondary school and 35.51% in higher education. The enrolment for 0 to 3 year olds is not available in the MoNE statistics. Aran et al. (2014) find, from Statistics of Income and Living Conditions (SILC, 2009), that among 0-5 year olds, the ratio of children in day-care or pre-school is lower than 10% for households below the median income and around 10% for those above the median with the exception of the top 10% for whom the rate is about 30%. They also find that the ratio of those in day-care is less than a few percentage points for all except the top decile of income distribution (for whom the rate is about 10%).

Although a pilot project to provide kindergarten education to all children in certain provinces was planned, this was shelved in 2012 with an education reform extending compulsory education from 8 to 12 years. The new system reduced the primary school enrolment age by one year, requiring children to start primary school as soon as they are 60 months old rather 72 months (later it was made optional for those who are 60-66 months old).

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<sup>1</sup> Government's stance *vis-à-vis* the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 was denial at first, until the March 2009 municipal elections, which was followed by a number of policy initiatives. Recall that the crisis had a significant impact on the Turkish economy, with stagnation in 2008 and a drastic contraction of 4.8% in GDP in 2009. A majority of policy initiatives were fiscal stimulus policies in the form of various tax relief programs covering automotive, appliances, furniture and computer sectors or in the form of incentive schemes for investors. Also prevalent was support to increase employment by providing subsidized social security payments for new employees and a large number of training programs by İŞKUR. Finally, the Turkish Central Bank increased liquidity both in domestic and foreign currency. Recovery as observed in the GDP figures was also impressive, with 9.2% and 8.8% in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Facing a large current account deficit, though, policy measures were taken to slow down the economy, which resulted in a growth rate of 2.2% and 4% in 2012 and 2013, respectively. This resulted in higher relative poverty (23.8% in 2009 compared to 22.8% in 2007) and unemployment (17.5% in 2009 compared to 22.8% in 2007), but both improved significantly in the following years, with the poverty rate of 22.6% in 2011 and the unemployment rate of 9.2% in 2012. The policies aimed at boosting the economy and increasing employment did not have the direct aim of tackling increasing poverty, however. Neither did it reduce social policy spending. The share of public social expenditure remained roughly the same over that period.



A communiqué in 2012 by MoNE announced a commitment to an enrolment target of 100% for pre-school education for the year 2023 (targeting 48-60 months-old children).<sup>2</sup> Another communiqué in the summer of 2014 mentioned the target of 70% (the target was also mentioned in the 10th Development Plan). To achieve that target, MoNE instructed public primary schools to switch to half-day education in pre-primary classes in order to serve a larger quantity of students.<sup>3</sup> The communiqué also instructed the Ministry's provincial officers to take steps to ensure that more children enrolled in pre-primary education. It is yet to be seen whether this will result in increasing numbers in pre-primary schools.<sup>4</sup>

We should note that the quality of education is rather low in Turkey, although we do not have specific measures for pre-primary schooling. The average number of students per classroom is around 20 in pre-primary schooling (MoNE, 2014). Regulation for operating childcare facilities requires at least one personnel per group of at most 20 children, with an undergraduate degree from one of the departments related to childcare (such as social services, psychology, child development, or pre-school education). However, if such candidates are not available, it allows for the employment of graduates from vocational high schools on child development and education. Other personnel should preferably have a high-school degree and have a certificate of child development and education or childcare. All personnel are required to receive training at least once a year for 10 hours.<sup>5</sup>

While pre-primary education is largely lacking and of low quality, primary and secondary education also has fundamental problems. Due to reforms in 2012 extending compulsory schooling to 12 years (from 8 years), school enrolment has significantly increased. Yet public schools often run only half-days and classrooms are crowded. The quality of education is rather low as shown in low Pisa test scores by Turkish students (Oral and McGivney, 2011).

### 2.1.2 Family benefits

In Turkey poverty is high and even higher among children. The absolute poverty rate in 2009 (the latest available figure for child poverty) was 18.08% in general and 24.04% among children aged 0 to 6, and 25.77% among children 0-15 years old.<sup>6</sup> While the poverty rate among single member households was 10.5%, the rate was 15.2% among couples with two children, and 34.1% among single parent households.

Turkey currently lacks an integrated social policy but is expected to implement a reform programme soon. The current system is composed of a number of coexisting fragmented schemes, such as old age pensions, assistance to widowed women, disability benefits, and in-kind and cash assistance to poor households of varying amounts. Beneficiaries are, to a large extent, determined at the discretion of Social Assistance and Cooperation Foundations (Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakıfları—SYDV).

Various press releases by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (MoFSP) mentioned the objective of formalizing and restructuring the social assistance programme with a more regular and properly based program that would be coordinated with active inclusion and education policies. But neither a "social investment approach" nor an "orientation towards children" have been explicitly mentioned. Hence, a structured

<sup>2</sup> The document sets the target date as 2013 but that is certainly a typo and should have read 2023. <http://www.meb.gov.tr/haberler/2012/12YillikZorunluEgitimeYonelikGenelge.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The communiqué, dated 8/8/2014, applies unless the number of non-enrolled children in that school's area is less than 10, which MoNE expects to happen only in rural areas and districts with low population.

<sup>4</sup> There also are 13 special pre-primary schools serving disabled children.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.4428&MevzuatIliski=0&sourceXmlSearch=%F6zel%20kre%FE>

<sup>6</sup> TÜİK provides detailed poverty statistics based on an absolute poverty threshold. The absolute poverty rate, however, has not been announced since 2009 because the methodology is under revision. Although a relative poverty rate based on 60% of median income is also calculated, it is not officially calculated/announced for sub-segments of the population.

formal policy specifically addressing child poverty is completely lacking, and does not appear to be a part of the upcoming reforms, at least in the initial phase.

There are a few programmes in place specifically targeting children. Among these the conditional cash transfer is the most influential one. The programme started after the 2001 economic crisis with support from the World Bank and has been continued by the Ministry since 2007 with government resources. The program aimed to incentivize enrolment in education and regular health controls for small children and pregnant women. Payments were rather small but still attractive for poor households, with 30 TL for boys' primary schooling, 35 TL for girls in 2014. For secondary school, the amounts were 45 and 55 TL for boys and girls, respectively. In 2013 2.4 million students received support, amounting to a total of 0.5 million TL. Health checks for 0-6 years were rewarded by 30 TL per month. About 2.4 million children benefited at a cost of about 200 million TL in 2013 (MoFSP, 2014).<sup>7</sup>

An early evaluation by the World Bank found that most of the funds reached the poorest ten percent of the population and none to those in high-income brackets. It is also important to note that a large part of the transfers, about two thirds, has been to households in the Eastern and South East Anatolia regions (Duman, 2012). Ahmed et al. (2007) reports that the programme increased secondary school enrolment among girls by 10.7% and attendance by 5.4%. In rural areas the overall enrolment in secondary school increased by 16.7%.

In-kind benefits are rather common in social assistance schemes in Turkey. Regarding children, most in-kind benefits are related to education. School books for primary and secondary education are distributed to all children in public schools for free. The benefit is not targeted, and as of the 2014-2015 school year it also includes those in private schools. The cost in 2013 was 275 million TL (MoFSP, 2014). Another benefit that was not targeted but covered all children in public schools was a milk project in the spring semesters of 2012 and 2013. Children were provided with 200 ml packages of milk every school day.

In a more targeted benefit in 2013, 89 million TL was spent for the school materials of students in need. Unlike the schoolbooks that are provided to all, the support for school materials requires identification of those in need and is likely to lead to some stigmatisation among children.

In remote locations students are transported to their school with busses or provided accommodation at the school. Expenditure for these students paid by the government amounted to 1.7 million TL in 2013 (MoFSP, 2014).

Finally, 1.7% of the total social assistance budget was spent by the Directorate for Children in 2013 (59.6% was spent by social assistance in general, 24.5% by the Directorate for Elderly and Disabled), with a focus on those children who are orphaned, abandoned or abused (MoFSP, 2014). The Directorate for Children provides care to these children, and when financial assistance makes it possible for them to live with their own or foster families, such assistance is provided. In December 2014 56,018 children were supported through such payments. The assistance is also provided to those children who cannot continue their education in the absence of such support. To award assistance, an application to the Directorate is assessed by social workers. Apparently these programmes target a very specific group and are very limited in scope.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.1.3 Parenting Service

Social services in general and parenting services in particular are almost non-existent. There have been a few programmes where government cooperated with universities but these were for short time periods and with a rather limited scope. Recent attempts by MoFSP to establish social service centres in all provinces are still in progress. A

<sup>7</sup> 1 Euro was 2.91 TL on average in 2014.

<sup>8</sup> <http://cocukhizmetleri.aile.gov.tr/data/544e2899369dc318044059c3/Aral%C4%B1k.pdf>

recent attempt to introduce these in South-eastern and Eastern regions appears to have made an impact. Finally, a number of municipalities have social service centres where psychologists are employed to provide services to families.

## 2.2 Supporting parents' labour market participation

### 2.2.1 Childcare

Female labour force participation is low in Turkey, with only one third of women in the labour force. Lack of affordable access to childcare has been cited among the reasons for low labour force participation especially for middle class households (Beşpınar, 2010; Aran et al., 2014). Looking after children or the incapacitated was indicated as the main reason for part-time employment by 9.3% of women in 2013.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of low labour force participation was also noted in the National Employment Strategy (NES) of 2014 (where a target rate of 41% was set for 2023), and the importance of childcare was emphasized (Ministry of Labour and Social Services, 2014). Accordingly, a project to provide financial assistance for childcare was proposed.

It should be noted that childcare facilities are few and public schools are often half-day, making it rather difficult for women with children to get into the job market. Although exact figures are not available, private facilities are expensive and beyond reach for most employees.

As part of its effort to increase female labour force participation, the government announced programmes to support the use of childcare services. According to a recent policy proposal by the Social Security Institution (SGK), women who are working will be supported with 1,000 TL per month for babies 0 to 24 months old. It should be noted that a simulation by Aran et al. (2014) found the impact of such subsidies to be low, about one percentage point in the long run at a cost of 138 million TL (around €50 million) per month. It should be noted that the amount of subsidy used in their simulation was about half the amount announced by SGK.

Another policy proposal, announced in early January 2015, by PM Davutoğlu envisages requiring municipalities to provide childcare services. Also included in the package is a tax concession on the use of childcare facilities. The details of the programme are yet to be seen.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that the government's current policy of increasing fertility, as exemplified by a recent announcement of monetary payments encouraging marriage and children, appears to be in contrast with its efforts to increase female labour force participation.

### 2.2.2 Long-term care

Long-term care facilities are few in Turkey. The government has been following a policy directing families, and mostly women, to take care of their elderly and disabled. The policy has been criticised for making it difficult for women to participate in the labour force.

Facilities where "day-care" services will be provided to the elderly, supporting households during the daytime, are planned to grow by five new facilities each year

<sup>9</sup> Note, however, that more than 75% reported the main reason for part-time employment under the heading of 'other reasons'. [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa\\_epgar&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa_epgar&lang=en)

<sup>10</sup> Another important policy is to provide incentives to employers for hiring female employees. In response to the 2008 global economic crisis Turkey reduced some of the employer contributions for social security for female and youth employment. According to the new legislation (no. 5763), social security premiums for newly employed youth between the ages of 18 and 29 and women of all ages were to be paid by the government. The payment covered the entire premium for the first year, decreasing by 20% in each of the following years. While initially planned for only one year, the incentives were extended until July 2010 in February 2009 (law no. 5838). In February 2011 incentives were further extended until 2015 and the government was given the power to extend the incentives by another 5 years.

until 2017 according to MoFSP's strategic plan. Facilities where elderly people are cared for in a home-like environment, called "Hope Homes (Umut Evleri)" and "Elderly Life Homes (Yaşlı Yaşam Evleri)", number 28, it is planned to add 10 new facilities each year until 2017 (MoFSP, 2012; MoFSP, 2014). These steps, however, are rather insufficient to keep up with needs.

### **2.2.3 Maternal/paternal/parental leave schemes**

The current legislation allows for a total of 16 weeks of maternal leave, which is expected to be used equally before and after the birth. Expecting mothers may use as little as 3 weeks of the leave before the birth and use the rest (up to 13 weeks) after the birth. Women may also take unpaid leave for a further six months. There are plans to take this period into account in career promotion for women employed in the public sector. Paternal leave is non-existent except for government employees who are entitled to 10 days.

There is a new legislation being prepared which expected to be adopted in early 2015. A key component appears to be more flexible work arrangements especially for women with children or expecting one. The legislation is expected to propose new work arrangements where women with children could participate in the labour market. Among such arrangements, the new law is expected to include the extension of pregnancy leave by one week as well as another two to six months where the mother works half-time but is paid fully with the government paying for the difference. Parents will also be allowed to work 30 hours per week (rather than 45) until the child is 5.5 years old. To what extent these two measures could be implemented in practice and whether they will have an adverse effect on female employment is yet to be seen.

The new law will also bring guarantees for women to be able to go back to their job work after the pregnancy and the paternal leave of 10 days will be extended to the private sector.

## **2.3 Policy measures to address social and labour market exclusion**

### **2.3.1 Unemployment benefits**

Unemployment benefit was introduced in 2002 and covers only the formally employed population. Furthermore, to use the benefits one needs to have paid unemployment insurance premiums for 600 days during the previous three years (of which 120 days should be immediately before unemployment). Beneficiaries receive 40% of the average pay they received during the previous four months, but the amount cannot exceed 80% of the minimum wage. The duration of benefits ranges from 300 days to 1,080 days depending on the duration of employment in the preceding three years.

Considering that one third of the labour force is informal and that those jobs are the most insecure ones, the coverage of unemployment benefit is far from satisfactory. Indeed in December 2014 the number of beneficiaries was about 290,000 (İŞKUR 2014).

This being said, there are plans to increase the duration and amount of the benefits as announced in NES 2014.

### **2.3.2 Minimum income**

There currently is no minimum income scheme in place in Turkey. Planned reforms, expected to be implemented in 2015, will likely introduce such a scheme but the details are not known yet.

The current social assistance scheme is composed of fragmented programmes providing rather low amounts of assistance. Examination of the social assistance programmes in place shows that in 2013 3 million households benefited from them. 2.25 million received regular assistance. All these payments amounted to 1.35 per cent of GDP in 2013 (MoFSP, 2014). Yet, our own calculations from household surveys by TÜİK show that these assistance amounts are far from raising households above

the poverty threshold. Yakut-Cakar et al. (2012) found in a cost simulation that the costs of a minimum income scheme would range between 0.1% of GDP, in which case very little improvement is expected in the poverty rates, and 4% of GDP, in which case poverty is largely eliminated.

### 2.3.3 Active labour market policies

The institution that was responsible for employment, İŞKUR, has been restructured and it launched a number of programmes in recent years. Part of the new programmes was financed by the EU Finance Cooperation Programme (AB Mali İşbirliği Programı) with funds amounting to €13 million within the "Public Employment Services Improvement Operation"<sup>11</sup> (€11 million of the budget is provided by EU funds). An emphasis on active labour market policies has also been noted in the recent NES of 2014.

Among İŞKUR activities one notes one-to-one consultations with unemployed individuals, employment fairs and career days as well as visits to employers. Service points have also been increased (İŞKUR, 2012). A number of training programmes, some offering employment guarantees, are provided by İŞKUR. There also is an attempt to build a bridge between social assistance programmes and İŞKUR's activities.<sup>12</sup> Since April 2014 'able-bodied' beneficiaries between the ages of 18 and 45, living in households with no employed individual, are registered with İŞKUR. They receive help in preparing a CV and are directed to vacant jobs and training programmes. They receive assistance for job application costs. Even after employment they are given priority for in-kind assistance (coal and food) and education support. Conditional cash transfers are paid for a total of 12 months during the first three years of employment.

Finally, it is worth noting that İŞKUR has been significantly more active in recent years in conducting life-long learning and training programmes. However, though these efforts resulted in higher participation in education and training programmes (from 5.6% in 2008 to 8.9 in 2013), the level is still low.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3.4 Social services

Work by MoFSP for establishing social service centres where various social services will be provided in an integrated system is still in progress. A new directive was legislated in 2013 (dated 09.02.2013, published in Official Gazette no. 28554). In parallel a programme called ASDEP (Family Social Support Programme) was started. With the new programme, MoFSP specialists will determine the needs of households, provide basic counselling as well as information on public welfare programmes and services at the local level. The programme will be implemented in four provinces (Rize, Kırkkale, Sakarya and Ankara/Altındağ) in 2015. It is expected to be implemented gradually in other provinces, reaching 100% coverage by 2017 (MoFSP, 2012).

Also notable are more than 50 Family Support Centres built in 13 Eastern and South Eastern provinces. Facilities target women and children, providing a range of vocational courses and training programmes as well as social and cultural activities.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.kip.org.tr/>

<sup>12</sup> These attempts also aim to address the concern that social assistance programmes that exclude the working poor are discouraging labor force participation or encouraging unregistered work.

<sup>13</sup> Eurostat, trng\_lfs\_01: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng\\_lfs\\_01&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=trng_lfs_01&lang=en)

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