

What is policy linking?

Policy linking is a method used to link different student assessments to a common scale. It allows countries to use their existing assessments – sub-national, national, and cross-national – for reporting on global student learning outcome indicators, namely Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 4.1.1 (a, b, and c) and the USAID Foreign Assistance (“F”) Indicators. These indicators require data on the percentage of students achieving global minimum proficiency in each country. Through policy linking, countries set assessment-specific global benchmarks based on minimum proficiency descriptors associated with a common scale (see below).

The results can be used to:

- **Compare** student assessment results across countries that have linked their assessments to a common scale
- **Examine** the results on different assessments within countries, including assessments in national languages
- **Aggregate** assessment results across countries to report on global student learning outcome indicators
- **Track** assessment results on a sub-national, national, and cross-national basis over time to monitor progress

How does policy linking work?

Policy linking works by linking student assessments to the Global Proficiency Framework (GPF), which describes the Global Minimum Proficiency Levels expected of students at grades one to nine in reading and mathematics. The four levels of the GPF—Below Partially Meets, Partially Meets, Meets, and Exceeds Global Minimum Proficiency—comprise common scales for each grade and subject (see the Global Proficiency Framework Overview).

Student assessments are linked to the GPF through global benchmarks that are based on the difficulty of each assessment. At a given grade and subject, less difficult

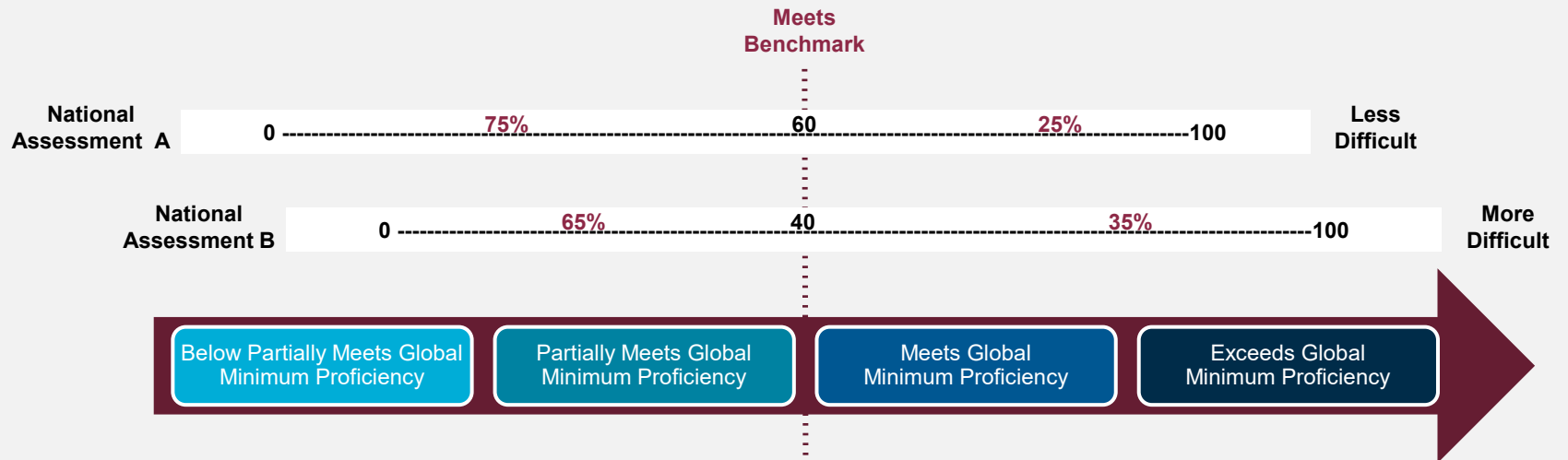
assessments will have higher benchmarks, and more difficult assessments will have lower benchmarks on the common scale in the GPF. For instance, Country A and Country B have national assessments with scales of 0 to 100 points. They link their assessments to the GPF. National Assessment A—which is less difficult—has a meets global minimum proficiency benchmark of 60 points while National Assessment B—which is more difficult—has a meets benchmark of 40 points. In theory, a student with an ability level of just meeting global minimum proficiency, and who takes the two assessments, would score 60 points on the less difficult assessment and 40 points on the more difficult assessment.

Below Partially Meets Global
Minimum Proficiency

Partially Meets Global
Minimum Proficiency

Meets Global
Minimum Proficiency

Exceeds Global
Minimum Proficiency



As illustrated above, National Assessments A and B vary in difficulty but the GPF common scale (in red) remains constant, so benchmarks linked to the GPF are equivalent.

Once their assessments are linked to the common scale, countries apply their global benchmarks to the score distributions of those assessments to calculate the percentage of their students meeting global minimum proficiency. In this example, 25 percent of students in Country

A meet global minimum proficiency compared to 35 percent of students in Country B. More precise score interpretation is possible, and even advisable, by setting three global benchmarks (i.e., partially meets, meets, and exceeds global minimum proficiency) on each assessment and calculating the percentages of students in four levels (i.e., below partially meets, partially meets, meets, and exceeds global minimum proficiency).

How is policy linking implemented?

Policy linking is implemented through a judgmental process requiring teachers' and specialists' participation in workshops for each country. These workshops have three tasks for setting global benchmarks on each assessment:

- **Task 1:** Check the content alignment between the assessment and the GPF using a standardized procedure
- **Task 2:** Match each of the assessment items with the appropriate levels and global descriptors of the GPF

- **Task 3:** Set global benchmarks (usually partially meets, meets, and exceeds) using a standardized procedure

The method and tasks are explained in the Policy Linking Toolkit. It has accompanying materials so that a country can implement a policy linking workshop to set their global benchmarks. Training programs and international facilitators are available to provide in-person and/or virtual guidance (see the Policy Linking How-To Guide).