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# Meeting the mental health needs of children with special educational needs following COVID-19

## Advocating for the critical role of psychologists in education

## **White paper Standing Committee Psychology in Education**

### **Meeting the mental health needs of children with special educational needs following COVID-19: Advocating for the critical role of psychologists in education**

Children with special educational needs (SEN) and their families have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These children have been more likely to have missed school during the COVID-19 pandemic, to have lost access to support services, and to experience further exacerbation of existing mental health difficulties.<sup>1,7,8,11</sup>

However, it is now well-documented that children with SEN and their families still struggle to get timely access to additional specialist support to have their mental health needs met.<sup>4</sup> Although international organisations, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), have been calling for the incorporation of mental health support into the COVID-19 response, highlighting that investing in this area now could help mitigate mental health consequences in the future, it is still questioned whether sufficient resources are being deployed to address this.<sup>2,12</sup>

Therefore, navigating access to mental health services during the COVID-19 recovery phase may be particularly challenging for them.

Psychologists in education are well-equipped to play a key role in meeting the mental health needs of children with SEN during the ongoing recovery phase from COVID-19.<sup>6,9,10</sup> We note that psychology in education professionals are trained to understand, recognise, and support the mental health needs of all children, including those with SEN.<sup>3,5,9</sup> They are well-skilled to work directly or through supporting school staff in a proactive and preventative manner to meet the elevated mental health needs children with SEN and their families have following the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>6,13</sup>

Therefore, the Standing Committee of Psychology in Education of the European Federation of Psychologists (EFPA) is advocating for the urgent need of psychologists in education to play a critical role in supporting the mental health of all children and those with SEN and their families through the recovery phase from COVID-19 and in the case of any similar complex global emergency in the future.

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