

PREPAREDNESS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PANDEMIC CRISIS TIME: IDENTIFYING ENABLERS AND CHALLENGES TO RESPOND TO DISABLED STUDENTS' AND THEIR FAMILIES' NEEDS

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Background

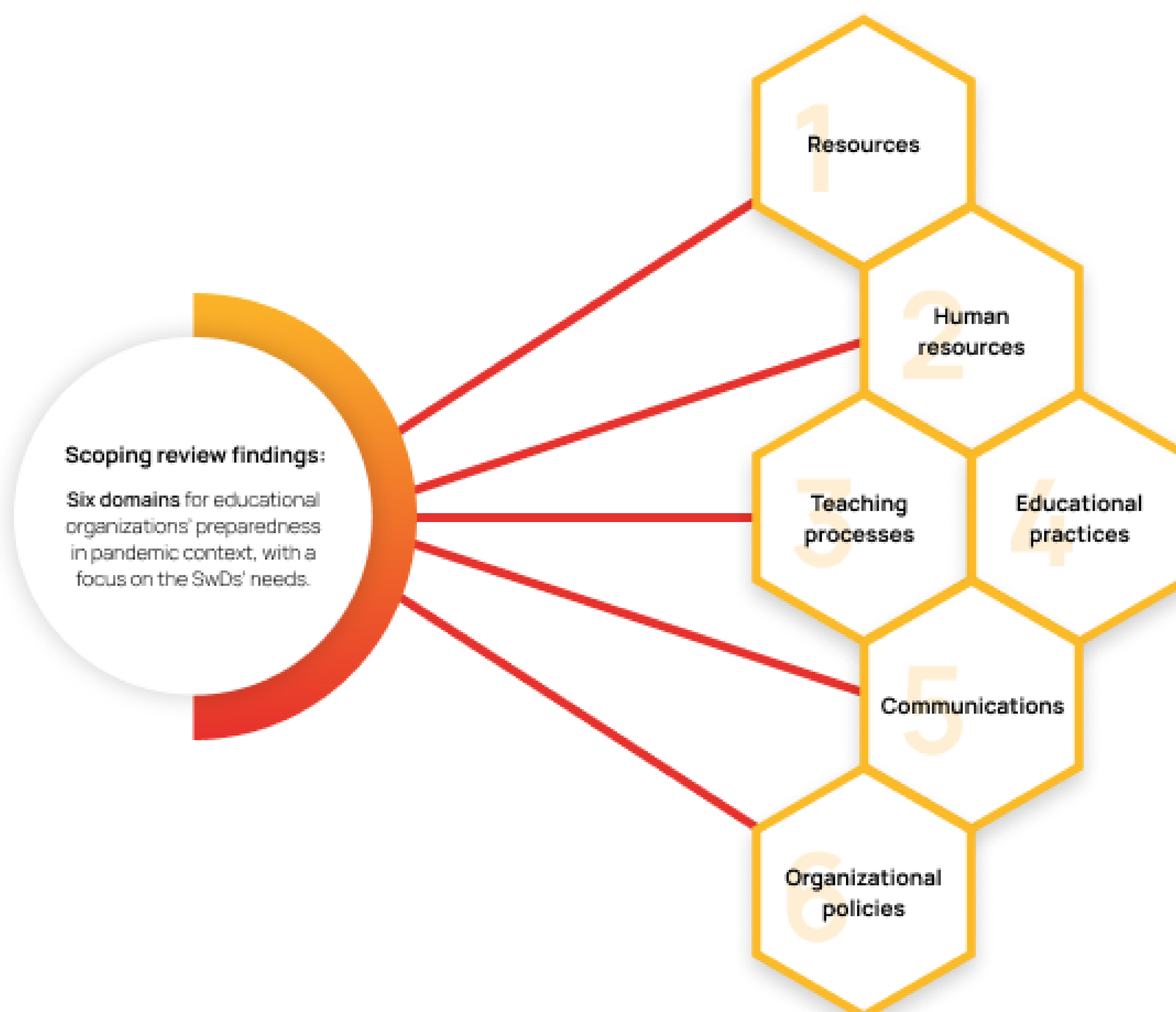
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational systems has caused a paramount shift on the organization and delivery of education worldwide. All involved stakeholders were confronted abruptly by an unprecedented reality without being prepared beforehand. Regrettably, the spillovers of the pandemic crisis on educational systems proved to be detrimental for students with disabilities (SwDs) highlighting the looming social and educational inequalities and the huge gap in organizational preparedness in education. In Greece, the systemic weaknesses of the education system peaked to the education of SwDs in both mainstream and special education settings. 105,970 SwDs and their families, namely the 7,8% of the national student population, were affected heavily at educational, social, and economic levels compromising their right to actively participate in inclusive, sustainable, and resilient school communities. Albeit the prompt policy responses to pandemic implications, no preparation or response measures were taken to support the SwDs and their families. The organizational preparedness and response planning of educational organizations was found poor and non-disability inclusive.

The gap

The preparedness gap in educational organizations in pandemic crisis times

The findings

Six organizational preparedness domains and fourteen indicators have been found to inform the preparedness plan for educational organizations. They may be used by education and policy to get the educational organizations properly and inclusively prepared to respond effectively to a future crisis.



Methods

The research project AIDiSo is anchored in a scientifically sound methodology drawing on the systems thinking change and on organizational preparedness conceptual frameworks from an inclusive approach. The mixed methods design for data collection and analysis, supported by several qualitative and quantitative tools, was deemed the most appropriate to unpack the complexities and multi-layers of the under-development preparedness plan.

The following three levels of data analysis were used to gain in-depth and comprehensive insights to inform the preparedness plan: a) parents and disabled students exploring their experiences, psychosocial and educational needs as well as their opinions and perspectives about the support systems, measures and services they received during the pandemic; b) mapping of the existing strategies, support services, educational programs, resources, and practical tools and identifying the potential gaps against the real needs of SwDs and their families; c) assessment of the effectiveness of organizational strategies and synthesis of the findings into a structured database to inform the preparedness plan.