

Executive summary

Despite experiencing sustained macroeconomic growth for many years, levels of poverty and inequality remain high in the Dominican Republic. Promoting inclusive growth is therefore a priority for the government, as reflected in its key document, the National Development Strategy.

Access to quality services, such as social programmes, healthcare or education, provides citizens with a means to connect with social and economic networks and access opportunities. As part of its vision for inclusive growth, the Dominican Republic is working to improve the quality of and access to services for all citizens, regardless of income levels, location or other social and economic determinants.

The country faces several challenges as it seeks to achieve this goal. Overall, citizens report limited satisfaction with public services in the country, often reflected in less-than-optimal service outcomes. Demographic dynamics are also important: high population growth, coupled with an accelerated pace of urbanisation and a large share of minorities living in poverty, place increasing demands on services in a context of limited fiscal space. Relatively low government revenues and low tax morale constrain the available resources for the government to improve public services.

Despite a strong drive for reform, there is a need to strengthen institutional co-ordination and efficiency as the foundation for effective service delivery. The combined underpinning of the public sector by a stronger, more coherent institutional foundation, administrative simplification, digital transformation and innovation will be crucial as the Dominican Republic continues to try to meet these challenges.

Numerous institutional reforms undertaken over the past 50 years have led to a whole-of-government vision-setting and planning mechanism, supported by a network of rules that help improve co-ordination and decision making. However, the full potential of these reforms remains to be realised. First, operationalisation is lacking, as key regulations are not yet enacted. Second, overlapping mandates and weak co-ordination undermine the effectiveness of the institutional setting, particularly in the social sector. Third, the lack of integration of existing information systems, including those that collect user feedback and experience, inhibits the use of information for better targeting and tailoring services and monitoring outcomes. Similarly, evaluation mechanisms are not yet fully integrated into decision making, in part due to a weak accountability system.

To strengthen the institutional foundation of service delivery, the government of the Dominican Republic should focus on rationalising its administrative structure in order to minimise duplication, strengthen whole-of-government co-ordination, pursue the integration and shared use of information systems, and focus on capacity building at the institutional and municipal level for planning and evaluation. The Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) could play a key role in leading this transformation.

Administrative simplification, as an initial component of a broader regulatory policy strategy, should play an important role in implementing accessible and fit-for-purpose

regulations that help improve service delivery. Despite initial steps such as the implementation of one-stop shops, centralised registries or the service charters programme, the Dominican Republic currently lacks a comprehensive simplification strategy. As a result, initiatives have been hindered by a lack of co-ordination and direction, while administrative burdens and formalities have grown, both in number and complexity. In addition, most initiatives have been predominantly business-oriented, and there is a need to complement these efforts with those focused on facilitating access to and the efficiency of public services for citizens.

The Dominican Republic should expand and broaden existing initiatives by first assessing existing burdens, and then targeting priorities in a coherent public service simplification strategy, including explicit accountability targets. This should be complemented by institutions that can engage with stakeholders, particularly subnational governments, and provide them with guidance and capacity-building support. Overall, the focus on simplification could lay a foundation for an explicit, whole-of-government regulatory policy.

Digital government has been an important area of focus for successive governments in the Dominican Republic. A robust regulatory framework for digital government, together with technical standards, guidelines and supporting institutions (including the Presidential Office for ICT), have been established. Despite these efforts, there is a pressing need to adopt a strategic approach toward using digital technologies to improve efficiency, service delivery and policy making.

In particular, there is a gap between existing regulations and implementation. Public institutions are often not aware of existing policies, and co-ordination institutions lack the tools to pursue whole-of-government implementation. Clarifying and reinforcing the overall governance and co-ordination framework for digital government will be essential for making existing regulations, tools and mechanisms fully effective. Laying the necessary groundwork for digital service delivery, including digital signatures, mobile technology and a common digital identity for service users, together with a more participatory approach to service delivery, including through alternative channels, will help support more inclusive and effective service outcomes. In the future, the government should pursue a more robust data governance system, including interoperable public sector information systems. This, along with the use of open government data to support user-driven service delivery, will enhance public value creation.

Finally, innovation within the public sector can lead to better service delivery. Technological and operational innovations can help improve not only the quality of services, but also the trust among citizens, business and public institutions. With the right capacities and resources, the Vice Ministry of Innovation and Modernisation within MAP has a leading role to play in the whole-of-government orientation towards innovation.

Together with strengthening the capacity of executive institutions, other improvements are necessary to create an environment conducive to public sector innovation in the Dominican Republic. In particular, the organisation and workflow across the public sector could be improved to make innovation a part of daily operations. Similarly, there is a need to improve the flow and use of data across institutions. Underlying these efforts, there remains a need to improve the strategic management of human resources, moving towards a merit- and performance-based bureaucracy. MAP can play a key role in helping to strike the right balance between the need for stability and control of public sector activities, and the necessary room for civil servants to innovate.



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