

Unclassified

English - Or. English

18 September 2026

**DIRECTORATE FOR FINANCIAL AND ENTERPRISE AFFAIRS
COMPETITION COMMITTEE**

Latin American and Caribbean Competition Forum

**LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COMPETITION FORUM - Session I: Competition
Law Enforcement in Informal Markets**

- Contribution from Dominican Republic -

14-15 October 2026

This Note his attached document from Dominican Republic is circulated to the Latin American and Caribbean Competition Forum (LACCF) FOR DISCUSSION under Session I at its forthcoming meeting to be held on 14-15 October 2026 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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JT03592663

Session I: Competition Law Enforcement in Informal Markets

- Contribution from Dominican Republic –

Contents

Session I: Competition Law Enforcement in Informal Markets - Contribution from Dominican Republic –	2
Competition and Informality in the Dominican Republic: Challenges for the Enforcement of Competition Law.....	3
1. Introduction	3
2. Informality in the Dominican Republic.....	4
3. Measuring Informal Labor Markets in the Dominican Republic	7
4. Cases of Informality in the Application of Law No. 42-08.....	8
4.1. Case: Production and Marketing of Eggs	9
4.2. Purified Water Market.....	9
4.3. Automotive Sector and Retail Trade	10
5. Challenges Facing the Implementation of Law 42-08	10
5.1. Difficulty in Identifying and Notifying Informal Economic Agents	10
5.2. Lack of Verifiable Information.....	11
5.3. Problems in Calculating and Enforcing Penalties.....	11
5.4. Limitations on Due Process	11
6. Proposal to Create a Competition and Informality Observatory	11
7. Conclusion.....	12
References	14

Competition and Informality in the Dominican Republic: Challenges for the Enforcement of Competition Law

1. Introduction

1. The informal economy is a structural feature of markets in Latin America and the Caribbean, accounting for approximately 53.1% of the labor force, equivalent to some 140 million workers¹. This phenomenon is highly heterogeneous: Bolivia, Guatemala, and Honduras, for example, have informal sector rates exceeding 70%, while Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay have rates below 50%. For their part, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Ecuador fall within an intermediate range, between 50% and 70%.

2. The high level of labor informality in Latin America and the Caribbean is reflected in the region's productive structure. Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) account for 99.5% of the business sector, while large enterprises make up just 0.5% of the total². In turn, microenterprises account for 88.4% of MSMEs, reflecting an economic structure characterized by small-scale productive units with limited capacity for accumulation. In many cases, these enterprises emerge as mechanisms for self-employment or subsistence in the face of constraints in the formal labor market, rather than as a result of sustained business growth. This reality contributes to the persistence of high levels of informality, low levels of productivity, and difficulties in the expansion of enterprises capable of generating quality formal jobs.

3. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines the informal economy as the set of productive activities carried out by individuals or economic units that, in law or in practice, are not adequately covered by formal agreements. It includes both the informal sector (non-formally constituted economic units) and informal employment (activities without labor protection or social security)³.

4. In this regard, understanding the effects of informal enterprises on competition is crucial for the effective enforcement of the law that protects them. La Porta and Shleifer (2008)⁴ develop three theoretical approaches to the role of informal enterprises in the economy, the scope of which depends on the sectoral context and market heterogeneity.

¹ Salazar-Xirinachs, José Manuel, and Juan Chacaltana, eds. 2019. *Formalization Policies in Latin America: Progress and Challenges*. International Labor Organization.

² M. Dini and G. Stumpo (eds.), "MSMEs in Latin America: Fragile Performance and New Challenges for Promotion Policies. Summary," Project Papers (LC/TS.2019/20), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2019.

³ International Labor Organization (ILO), "Resolution on Statistics of the Informal Economy," 21st International Conference of Labor Statisticians (Geneva, October 11–20, 2023), ICLS/21/2023/Res. I.

⁴ La Porta and Shleifer (2008), cited by Castilleja-Vargas, Liliana, and Sheyla Enciso. 2024. *Informal Competition and Productivity in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Technical Note No. 1699. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank.

5. The first is the “romantic” theory, which posits that informal firms have high productivity potential but face constraints stemming from regulation, the tax burden, and limited access to financing and property rights. Under this approach, formal and informal firms would be essentially similar in the absence of such distortions.

6. The second is the “parasitic” theory, according to which informal firms have lower productivity than formal ones but can exert significant competitive pressure by operating at lower costs and evading taxes, labor regulations, and quality standards.

7. Finally, the third is the “dual” theory, which holds that informal firms are also less productive—in part due to their restricted access to resources—but tend to operate in market segments distinct from those of formal firms, and therefore do not pose a direct competitive threat.

8. Beyond the theories explaining the role of informal firms in competition, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) found that formal firms are affected by informality; for a formal firm, regardless of its characteristics, “facing informal competition is associated with 15% lower productivity, on average, compared to firms that do not face informal competition.”⁵

9. The prevalence of informal competition in Latin America and the Caribbean is particularly high. According to the World Bank’s Enterprise Surveys, 71% of formal firms in the region’s manufacturing sector report facing competition from unregistered firms—a proportion significantly higher than that observed in other regions of the world. By comparison, this percentage stands at 36% in Emerging Europe, 49% in Africa, and 51% in Asia-Oceania⁶.

2. Informality in the Dominican Republic

10. In the Dominican Republic, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) constitute the main component of the business sector. They account for 98.5% of the businesses registered with the General Directorate of Internal Revenue (DGII)⁷. Furthermore, according to the Central Bank of the Dominican Republic, 94.2% of MSMEs are microenterprises, while the remaining 5.8% consist of small and medium-sized enterprises⁸.

11. Despite their importance within the national productive structure, business informality remains particularly high. It is estimated that 85.2% of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises operate outside formal regulations. This high level of informality reflects structural characteristics of a significant portion of the

⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶ Informal Competition and Productivity in Latin America and the Caribbean. Technical Note No. 1699. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank, p. 12.

⁷ <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/panorama/dinero/mipymes-representan-al-2023-el-98-5-de-las-empresas-registradas/>

⁸ Central Bank of the Dominican Republic. (2024). Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises in the Dominican Republic 2022–2023: Establishment Identification Survey and National MSME Survey. Key Findings and Methodological Aspects.

Dominican business sector, composed mainly of small-scale production units that face limitations in accessing markets, financing, and business support services.

12. Informal enterprises tend to be concentrated in low-productivity activities with low entry costs; they have few linkages with other sectors of the economy and often serve market segments not fully covered by formal enterprises. Furthermore, in many cases, these are family-owned or sole-proprietorship businesses that operate with limited resources and without access to formal financing or legal protection mechanisms. These conditions restrict their potential for growth, innovation, and the creation of quality jobs, contributing to the persistence of wide productivity gaps within the economy.

13. Nevertheless, the contribution of MSMEs to economic activity is significant. Microenterprises generate around 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP), while small and medium-sized enterprises contribute an additional 12%⁹. Furthermore, MSMEs are the primary source of jobs, accounting for 61.6% of total employment in the country.

14. Given their significant role in the productive sector and their contribution to the generation of value added and employment, the strengthening and formalization of MSMEs have become a priority of public policy aimed at productive development and competitiveness.

15. In this context, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and MSMEs (MICM), through the Vice Ministry for the Promotion of MSMEs, has launched the One-Stop Shop for Formalization, a technological platform designed to simplify and streamline the procedures required for businesses to join the formal economy. This initiative aims to reduce administrative barriers to formalization and promote greater integration of productive units into the formal economic system.

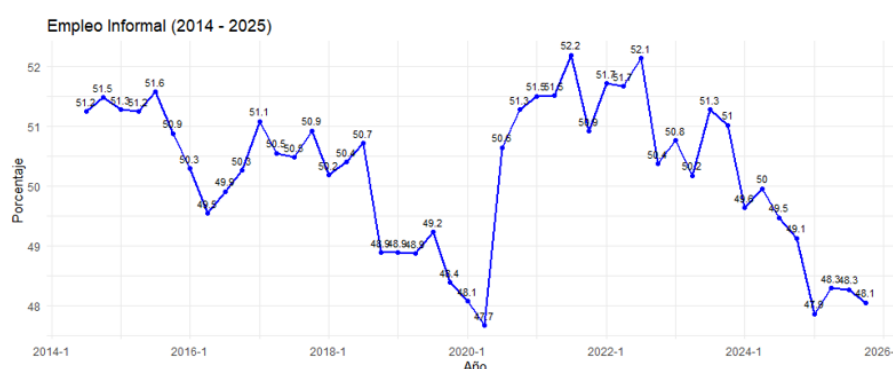
16. However, significant challenges persist that limit the formalization and growth of MSMEs. According to the National MSME Survey conducted by the Central Bank of the Dominican Republic, these businesses face obstacles related to the tax burden, high costs of raw materials and inputs, unfair competition, and restrictions on access to credit. These barriers reduce their capacity to invest, limit their productivity, and hinder their integration into more complex value chains. Consequently, promoting formalization requires not only the simplification of administrative procedures but also the implementation of comprehensive policies aimed at improving access to financing, strengthening business competitiveness, and creating incentives that make the transition to the formal economy more attractive.

17. Furthermore, there is also labor informality, which constitutes one of the main manifestations of economic informality and represents a structural and persistent phenomenon. Its prevalence is closely linked to the quality of employment, limited access to social protection, and a productive structure dominated by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that face constraints on productivity, financing, and growth. These characteristics hinder the creation of formal jobs and contribute to the persistence of high levels of informality in the labor market.

⁹ Ibid

18. Approximately 54% of the labor force is in the informal sector¹⁰. This phenomenon tends to decline during periods of economic expansion and to remain stable or increase during periods of economic slowdown¹¹. Confirming this finding, the International Monetary Fund found that informality in Latin America exhibits countercyclical behavior and acts as an important adjustment mechanism: during recessions, open unemployment rises less than expected because a significant portion of workers displaced from the formal sector moves to the informal sector.¹²

Figure 1. Trends in Informality, 2014–2025

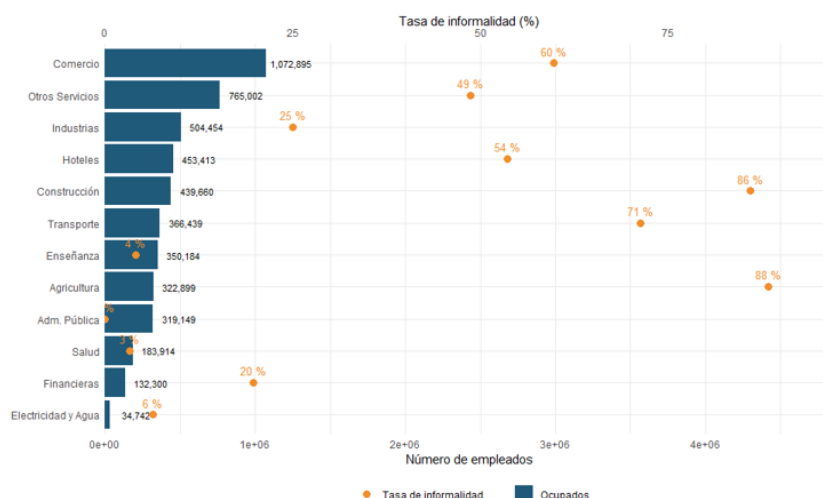


19. There is also marked sectoral heterogeneity: Agriculture and Construction exceed 85–88% informality, while Trade and Services show moderate levels. In contrast, highly regulated sectors such as Public Administration, Education, Health, and Electricity have rates below 5%.

¹⁰ Central Bank of the Dominican Republic. Continuous National Labor Force Survey (ENCFT)

¹¹ Mejía Santana, J. C. (2024). *Informal Employment and Economic Growth in the Dominican Republic: Long-Term Trends and Economic Cycles (2000–2023)*. Autonomous University of Santo Domingo.

¹² International Monetary Fund. Economic Outlook: The Americas. Labor Market Dynamics and Informality During the Economic Cycle in Latin America and the Caribbean. October 2019.

Figure 2. Number of Jobs and Informality Rate by Sector, 2025

Source: National Continuous Labor Force Survey (ENCFT).

20. This poses significant challenges for the analysis of competitive conditions. First, the presence of informal agents distorts the measurement of market share, since a significant portion of supply is unregistered, which can lead to an underestimation of the actual degree of competition or, conversely, an overestimation of the market power of formal firms.

21. Second, the substitutability between formal and informal goods and services introduces ambiguity in defining the relevant market, since, from the consumer's perspective, both may be partially interchangeable, even though they operate under different cost structures, regulations, and quality standards.

22. This implies that competition analyses must explicitly incorporate informality as a structural dimension of the market, recognizing that in highly informal sectors, competitive dynamics may be driven more by mechanisms of survival and self-employment than by traditional business strategies.

3. Measuring Informal Labor Markets in the Dominican Republic

23. The Dominican Republic has made significant efforts since the 1990s to measure the informal sector within the framework of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) 1982 Employment Program for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC)¹³.

24. In 1991, the Central Bank began conducting the National Labor Force Survey (ENFT) to capture the characteristics and heterogeneities of the labor market. This methodology had significant limitations, as it did not allow for distinguishing between the informal sector and informal employment. To measure informality, the ENFT used an indirect approach based primarily on firm size and sector of activity.

¹³ Rodríguez Núñez, Juan Bautista. Labor Informality and the Unobserved Economy: A Review of the Applied Literature in the Dominican Republic. Science, Economics, and Business, Vol. 8, No. 1, January–December 2024.

25. Starting in 2011, a new methodology more aligned with ILO standards was implemented with the aim of improving labor market indicators, particularly those related to informal employment, through the implementation of the Continuous National Labor Force Survey (ENCFT).

26. The main criteria currently used to measure the informal sector include the legal organization of the business—specifically, its registration in the National Taxpayers Registry (RNC)—the existence of organized accounting records, and possession of an operating license. With regard to informal employment, factors such as access to social security through employment (such as pension funds or health insurance), the existence of contracts—whether written or verbal—other associated employment benefits, as well as the status of unpaid family workers participating in formal units are taken into account.

27. This methodological update has made it possible to generate more accurate statistics, showing that informal employment is not limited to the traditional informal sector but is also present within formally established units.

Table 1. Criteria for Measuring the Informal Sector and Informal Employment according to the ENFT and the ENCFT

National Labor Force Survey (traditional)	National Continuous Labor Force Survey (new)
Measuring the informal sector	
Size of the production unit: employees working in companies with fewer than 5 employees	Legal status of the production unit (National Taxpayer Registry, RNC)
Occupational group: Self-employed workers or employers working in the following occupational groups: Farmers and ranchers; Operators and drivers; Artisans and factory workers; Merchants and salespeople; Unskilled workers	Registration in accordance with the legal/administrative provisions in force under national law (operating license)
Occupational category: Unpaid family workers ; Domestic service	Organized accounting
Measurement of informal employment	
Informal employment: this indicator was not included. The survey was designed to quantify the informal sector (not informal employment)	Access to social security through employment (pension fund or health insurance) Existence of a written or verbal contract Other employment-related benefits Unpaid family workers employed in the formal sector

Source: Taken from the Observatory on Social Policies and Development. Labor Informality in the Context of Social Development

4. Cases of Informality in the Application of Law No. 42-08

28. The coexistence of formal and informal economic actors creates a dual structure, which constitutes an obstacle to effective competition in the markets for goods and services, resulting in unfair competition, less innovation, and lower-quality products.

29. In the Dominican Republic, between 2018 and 2023, the problem posed by informality for the proper enforcement of Law No. 42-08 has become evident. During that period, the Executive Directorate of PRO-COMPETENCIA shelved 17 investigations because the markets exhibited a high degree of informality and/or economic agents failed to cooperate with the institution. The most significant cases are analyzed below.

4.1. Case: Production and Marketing of Eggs

30. The Executive Directorate dismissed the ex officio investigation initiated by Resolution DE-079-2018, as it was not possible to establish the existence of concerted practices or anticompetitive agreements (Article 5 of Law 42-08) consisting of price-fixing among producers and distributors.

31. Although there were reasonable indications, it could not be proven during the preliminary investigation phase that the sector's main association was facilitating or coordinating price-fixing among producers.

32. PRO-COMPETENCIA was unable to conduct a robust economic analysis of price behavior, costs, or production volumes, primarily due to the high degree of informality in the market. Despite multiple requests for information, inspection visits, and interviews, the association was not legally registered, and most producers (small and medium-sized) operated without adequate accounting records, without brand names or commercial packaging, and with very low traceability of their operations.

33. This structural informality was a determining factor that seriously limited the authority's ability to gather evidence. As the resolution itself acknowledges, the market is characterized by an opaque, heavily intermediated supply chain with minimal formal record-keeping, which prevented the authority from adequately cross-checking the evidence and verifying potential anticompetitive effects.

34. This case illustrates a key challenge in the enforcement of Law 42-08 in informal Dominican markets: the difficulty of gathering robust evidence and conducting sound economic analyses when economic agents operate primarily outside formal channels, without accounting records or reliable information systems.

4.2. Purified Water Market

35. The case of the bottled purified water market constitutes another paradigmatic example of how high levels of informality can impede the effective enforcement of competition law. Based on a complaint filed by an industry association, PRO-COMPETENCIA's Executive Directorate launched an investigation into alleged acts of unfair competition and abuse of a dominant position, specifically through predatory pricing practices by the company named in the complaint.

36. However, in the course of the investigation, it became evident that the underlying problem went beyond the individual behavior of a single company, revealing a structural characteristic of the market. Through on-site inspections and cross-checking information with the Ministry of Public Health, the authority found that more than 60% of purified water production was operating informally, through clandestine plants without health licenses or operational registrations. This empirical evidence made it possible to identify a significant gap between

actual consumption of the product and the quantities recorded in official statistics, implying the existence of a substantial portion of the supply that was completely unobserved by the government.

37. In analytical terms, this situation directly affected one of the fundamental pillars of any competition investigation: the definition of the relevant market and the characterization of the competitive structure. The invisibility of the majority of economic agents prevented an accurate estimation of key variables such as the number of suppliers, market shares, cost structure, and levels of concentration. Consequently, it was not possible to determine whether the alleged conduct—in particular, pricing below cost—constituted an anticompetitive strategy or was a response to structural market conditions distorted by informality.

38. This information gap not only limits the authority's analytical capacity but also compromises the validity of the investigative process, as it prevents the accumulation of sufficient evidence to support a decision. As a result, the Executive Directorate was compelled to dismiss the complaint because it could not establish the existence of prohibited practices, ordering the case to be closed.

4.3. Automotive Sector and Retail Trade

39. The Executive Directorate ordered the initiation of an investigation pursuant to a complaint filed by an association of vehicle manufacturers' dealers, through Resolution No. DE-053-2018. The complaint alleged acts of unfair competition in the vehicle import market, linked to noncompliance with legal provisions regarding tax adjustments.

40. The Executive Directorate found that six of the companies under investigation were not registered in the Commercial Registry and lacked a verifiable physical address. This situation made it impossible to effectively serve formal notices, as the addresses provided did not correspond to the actual locations of these entities. As a result, the investigations were significantly hindered, since it was not possible to identify the legally responsible parties, request accounting information, or access transaction records—which prevented the proper conduct of the proceedings and the eventual verification of the alleged conduct.

5. Challenges Facing the Implementation of Law 42-08

41. Law No. 42-08, the General Law on Competition, faces significant structural challenges stemming from the high level of informality in the Dominican economy. Given that more than 50% of the productive sector operates outside formal mechanisms, the competition authority faces serious limitations in identifying actors, obtaining reliable information, and imposing effective sanctions. Informality creates institutional challenges that can be interpreted as a problem of observability, traceability, and enforceability of competition law.

5.1. Difficulty in Identifying and Notifying Informal Economic Agents

42. One of the main challenges is the inability to accurately identify informal economic agents. In numerous cases investigated, companies operated without a

commercial registration, without a verifiable physical address, or under informal identities, making it impossible to locate those legally responsible.

43. This situation renders notification procedures—an essential element of due process—ineffective, since the addresses provided do not correspond to the entities under investigation or simply do not exist. Consequently, many investigations stall or must be closed due to the practical impossibility of continuing the process.

5.2. Lack of Verifiable Information

44. The absence of formal records, organized accounting, and transaction traceability constitutes another critical challenge. In highly informal markets, such as the purified water or poultry sectors, it is not possible to accurately determine fundamental variables such as the number of suppliers, production levels, market shares, or cost structures.

45. Furthermore, many transactions are conducted in cash and without documentation, which makes it impossible to verify the existence of collusive agreements or practices that restrict competition. In fact, between 2018 and 2023, several investigations had to be closed due to a lack of sufficient evidence directly linked to the absence of reliable information.

5.3. Problems in Calculating and Enforcing Penalties

46. The imposition of sanctions under Law 42-08 faces limitations when offending entities operate in the informal sector. Since many businesses are not formally incorporated as legal entities, there are no clear parameters for calculating fines, such as revenue, sales volume, or market share.

47. Furthermore, the absence of records hinders the effective enforcement of sanctions, as there are no identifiable assets or formal structures against which to enforce administrative decisions. This creates a “zone of impunity,” where the actors who most frequently violate competition rules are precisely those least affected by the authority’s actions.

5.4. Limitations on Due Process

48. Administrative due process is compromised in highly informal contexts. The inability to properly serve notices, access relevant information, and ensure the participation of those under investigation undermines the validity and continuity of proceedings.

49. Likewise, the lack of documentary evidence limits the ability to legally substantiate the competition authority’s decisions, which can result in cases being dismissed or in the inability to impose sanctions. This weakens institutional credibility and reduces the deterrent effect of the law.

6. Proposal to Create a Competition and Informality Observatory

50. For all the reasons mentioned above, PRO-COMPETENCIA has developed a proposal to create an Observatory on Competition and Informality with the aim of mitigating the structural limitations that informality imposes on

the effective enforcement of competition law. This mechanism would improve the availability, systematization, and analysis of relevant information on the interaction between market structure and informality, thereby helping to strengthen regulatory decision-making and the formulation of evidence-based public policies.

51. The competition authority faces not only regulatory constraints but also—and more significantly—limitations stemming from limited cooperation among economic agents and a lack of information, associated with poor traceability, the absence of records, and the low reliability of data in markets with high levels of informality. In this context, a specialized observatory is a key tool for bridging these gaps.

52. The Observatory on Competition and Informality is conceived as an analytical platform designed to:

- Integrate information from various statistical and administrative sources.
- Generate systematic indicators on labor and business informality.
- Analyze the relationship between informality and competitive conditions in markets.
- Support the competition authority’s investigative work through empirical evidence.

53. To make this proposal viable, the Observatory on Competition and Informality will formalize a strategic partnership with the Dominican Labor Market Observatory (OMLAD), a technical research body within the Ministry of Labor that conducts ongoing studies on the labor market. A close collaboration between the two entities would allow for the cross-referencing of labor informality indicators with metrics on competition and market structure.

7. Conclusion

54. The experience of the Dominican Republic confirms that informality is not a peripheral phenomenon, but rather a structural characteristic that directly influences the application of competition law. As discussed in Section 1, the coexistence of formal and informal actors introduces distortions in the measurement of market share and in the definition of the relevant market, making it necessary to incorporate informality as a distinct analytical dimension rather than as a residual factor.

55. The cases analyzed in Section 3—eggs, purified water, and the automotive sector—illustrate, from different angles, how this structural characteristic translates into concrete obstacles for the competition authority: the inability to identify and notify economic agents, the lack of verifiable information to support a rigorous economic analysis, and limitations in calculating and enforcing penalties. These factors largely explain why 17 investigations had to be closed between 2018 and 2023 for reasons directly linked to the informality of the market under investigation.

56. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the challenges described in Section 4—identification, verification of information, calculation of penalties, and due process safeguards—are not isolated incidents, but rather recurring

manifestations of the same problem regarding the observability, traceability, and enforceability of competition law. For this reason, PRO-COMPETENCIA has proposed the creation of the Observatory on Competition and Informality, in partnership with OMLAD, as an institutional response aimed at closing these information gaps and strengthening—with empirical evidence—the authority's capacity to act in markets with high levels of informality.

57. With this contribution, the Dominican Republic seeks to contribute to the regional discussion on the enforcement of competition law in informal markets, on the understanding that the challenges described here are shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by other jurisdictions in Latin America and the Caribbean with similar levels of informality.

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