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Introduction

The issue of civil service remunerations has received limited coverage in the literature on African public administrations, despite its enormous importance: remunerations indeed condition the performance of public services and have profound consequences on service delivery. While the remunerations of public servants are only partially constituted of base salaries, and tend to be complemented by a variety of other official and unofficial, public and private sources of income – fringe benefits, allowances of different kinds, bonuses, per diems, the perquisites of public office, and economic activities exercised outside the public sector (Nunberg 1988; Lindauer & Nunberg 1994; Nunberg & Taliercio 2012; see also Bertone & Witter 2015) – the issue of public sector pay has remained largely under-studied.

In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), despite recognition of the problems associated with the wage bill and payroll management in policy documents (RDC/Ministère de la Fonction Publique 2015a) – such as low salaries, substantial portions of civil servants going unpaid, extreme unevenness in allowances and salary supplements (*primes*), the absence of a proper public wage reform policy – the issue has received limited attention. Apart from a handful of studies and reports commissioned by the World Bank (Morganti 2007; Verheijen & Mabi Mulumba 2008; IBNS Consulting 2016), and sectoral reports focused on the education and health sectors (Verhaghe 2007; Brandt 2016; Maini 2015; Bertone & Lurton 2015), the question of civil service remunerations – particularly in the central administrative apparatus, by which we mean the ministerial administrations at the national level – remains rather poorly understood.

This is especially the case with regards to salary supplements. Indeed, since 2003, the government has used salary supplements as a means to complement low base salaries throughout the administration, but, as we shall see, this has come at the cost of instilling a high degree of fragmentation across administrative services and sectors, through acute differentials in remuneration. This system of salary supplements is in fact not specific to the DRC alone: a few studies of African bureaucracies highlight similar patterns (Bierschenk 2014: 233-234; Therkildsen 2014: 119), and the scandal of inordinately high salary supplements that rocked the French finance ministry in 2017 suggests the issue has much wider relevance¹. At the same time, the issue of civil service pay has received very limited attention in the literature on African public administrations (Blundo & Le Meur 2009; Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2014; De Herdt & Olivier de Sardan 2015), with the exception of studies focusing on corruption (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006). Indeed, aside passing mentions of the importance of allowances – often dwarfing the base salary and characterised by extreme inequalities – for understanding dynamics in African bureaucracies, the issue has not received any extended treatment.

¹ See <http://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/2017/12/20/20002-20171220ARTFIG00288-la-cour-des-comptes-epingle-les-salaires-de-bercy.php> and <https://www.slate.fr/tribune/41657/bercy-tyrannie-technocratique> [accessed 05.11.2024]

As such, this paper aims to provide an overview of the system of salary supplements in the Congolese civil service, based on research carried out between 2016 and 2018 on the political economy of human resource and payroll management in the DRC (Moshonas 2019a; Moshonas 2019b; Moshonas et al. 2019; Moshonas et al. 2022). To do so, we provide a rough typology of different type of salary supplements, and present their distribution in a set of ministries. The type of questions the paper attempts to answer are: what are the drivers of the system of salary supplements that (re)emerged from 2002-2003 onwards? How have processes of informalisation shaped the increasingly ‘wageless’ character of Congo’s public bureaucracy? What underpins differentials in salary supplements across different ministries and departments? What is the political economy surrounding their allocation and distribution? And what does this tell us about the functioning of the Congolese civil service?

Studying the system of salary supplements is highly relevant insofar as it provides very insightful glimpses into the bureaucratic practices which underpin and drive the civil service, and where financial flows play major structuring roles. As noted by Olivier de Sardan in his analysis of the complex of corruption, African societies are sutured by forms of negotiation and bargaining, which are frequently commodified and regulate almost all forms of current exchange (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 36) – a formulation quite apt for the Congolese bureaucracy, where financial transactions are omnipresent. As such, exploring the public wage system fits within a generally overlooked aspect of African bureaucracies: their internal dynamics, the control work of bureaucrats within ‘pure back offices which have no connection to the general publics but only to other public administrations’, where key professions (sectoral personnel, ministerial administrations, payroll management services) are vastly understudied from an empirical point of view (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2019: 244; Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2022). From this vantage point, public wage systems – insofar as they involve human resource and payroll management, patterns of budgetary allocation and (re)distribution and the functioning of the expenditure chain – provide an excellent entry point for understanding the political economy of public sector governance. This encompasses analysis of distributive patterns within the wage bill by paying close attention to the types of financial flows alimending particular types of remuneration, which in turn allows us to identify a set of distinct logics driving the allocation of salary supplements.

The empirical material presented in this paper draws on several rounds of field research conducted between 2016 and 2022². The paper draws on over 200 interviews conducted with key actors within and outside the civil service (both junior and senior civil servants in the ministries covered in the paper, members of political cabinets, trade union representatives, academics, as well as officials from aid agencies). Given the very delicate nature of the topic, interviews were conducted on a confidential basis, with anonymity for interviewees. All translations from French are done by the authors.

Additionally, three caveats should be borne in mind. First, while the magnitudes of particular salary supplements provided in this paper are only cited if triangulated by multiple sources, the salary supplements system is in constant flux (and especially where magnitudes are concerned), so our analysis is in certain ways a snapshot of the situation prevailing in 2017-2018; given this highly dynamic environment, and the quick evolution of particular situations, the account provided here is far from

² All of the payroll data cited here was collected in April-September 2017 and May-July 2018, as part of the research project ‘Power and policy-making in the DR Congo (2017-2019)’, tied to the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium II research programme, funded by FCDO and led by ODI (Moshonas 2018). This data was complemented occasionally by subsequent fieldwork (in April-June 2021 and January-March 2022), carried out as part of the FWO-funded research project ‘Understanding the political economy of Congo's civil service remunerations and recruitment system (2020-2024)’, which allowed us to confirm, correct, amend, contextualise and verify the information cited here.

definitive. Second, the data we provide draw from a set of 12 ministries (out of a total of around 45 ministries in 2018). Among the institutions covered, we have included several ministries with cross-cutting roles in financial, payroll, and human resource management (the ministries of Finance, Budget, Public Service), ministries managing substantial numbers of frontline service delivery personnel (ministries of Primary and Secondary Education, and Health), as well as line ministries in charge of sectors where the presence of salary supplements is highly uneven (ministries of State Enterprises, Environment, Rural Development, Hydrocarbons, and Technical and Professional Education, Justice, and Infrastructure and Public Works). As such, we are able to provide a fairly comprehensive picture of the strong differentiation which exists across institutions with regards to salary supplements. Third, the data presented here concerns exclusively the situation prevalent in the national, Kinshasa-based central administration, and does not delve into the situation of provincial and local administrations, where access to, and the magnitudes of salary supplements tends to be substantially reduced.

The paper is organised as follows. The first two sections provide an overview of trends within civil service remunerations in African administrations, before turning to their evolution in the DRC, emphasising the importance of salary supplements in relation to the base salary. The third and fourth sections present a typology of remunerations in the civil service, and an overview of their distribution in our sample of twelve ministries. The fifth section explores in more detail the drivers behind the system of salary supplements by zooming into three case studies, each of which shows a distinct logic behind their allocation: salary supplements linked to the relative strategic value of different ministries and departments within the bureaucratic apparatus (the cases of the ministries of Budget and Finance); salary supplements tied to linkages between particular services and their ministerial authorities (the case of the ministry of Primary and Secondary Education); and the importance of bottom-up mobilisations by civil servants in driving the expansion of the system of salary supplements (the case of the ministry of Health).

African public wage systems

In the 1980s, under the combined weight of economic crisis and structural adjustment, wage bills in several African countries came under sustained scrutiny: considered excessive by development agencies such as the World Bank, and a major factor aggravating the overall fiscal burden, they became key targets of policy-based lending (Schiller 1990: 81-82). The literature produced during this period by international financial institutions provides important insights in relation to African public wage systems.

Public sector pay and employment in Africa under structural adjustment

To begin with, despite a wide diversity of employment and pay conditions in Africa, some common patterns can be discerned. Perhaps the most common has been the erosion of public sector salaries in the face of inflation, resulting in an increasing compression of the ratio between top and bottom grade salaries (Nunberg 1988: 10; Lindauer, Meesook & Suebsaeng 1988: 6, 11), whereby the difference between directors and manual workers in terms of base salaries has narrowed. For example, in Ghana it closed from 6:1 to 2:1 between 1977 and 1984 (Ayee 2001: 13).

The consequences of low pay have been far-reaching, encompassing pervasive demoralisation, chronic absenteeism, corruption, moonlighting, as well as low compensation packages impairing the ability of governments to retain top talent leading to the flight of top and middle-level management from government positions (Nunberg & Taliercio 2012: 1971). Low pay has also been closely linked to

overstaffing: as Nunberg & Taliencio (*Ibid.*) put it, ‘public employment [became] an instrument for political patronage and social welfare’ (particularly in post-conflict settings such as the DRC, where there is strong pressure to employ ex-combatants or members of political factions). ‘Governments distribute[d] jobs to supporters and spread the limited wage envelope across a large number of workers. So, average wages and inter-grade and cross-service differentials [became] compressed’ (*Ibid.*). In fact, several reports from this period note the pervasive irony that while total government wage bills were too high, individual compensation packages for civil servants were too low (Schiller 1990: 85; Nunberg 1988: 3-4; Lindauer & Nunberg 1994).

Under the years of structural adjustment, International Financial Institutions promoted first-generation reforms which attempted to keep the government wage bill in check through retrenchment, rather than more comprehensive public employment-and pay policy reforms, so as to render the public sector more productive (Schiller 1990: 82; Nunberg & Taliencio 2012: 1972-1973). The World Bank’s approach sought to ‘reduce the wage bill, lower overall employment numbers, promote the maintenance of civil service salaries at levels ensuring the availability of competent government workers, and decompress salary structures so that talented managers do not leave for private, parastatal, or international jobs’ (Nunberg 1988: 6). Reforms during this period encompassed reduction of the wage bill through salary restraint, elimination of ghost workers, hiring freezes, voluntary retirement schemes, and dismissal of civil servants (Nunberg 1988: 6-13; Schiller 1990: 85-86).

However, such reforms were often carried out in the absence of adequate information about key pay and employment issues, and with limited attention afforded to political factors (Nunberg 1988: iii, 19). An added problem, in this respect, also stemmed from the absence of a link between personnel recruitment records and mechanised payroll data, as well as from incomplete data on public pay due to the lack of sufficient information about elaborate non-wage allowance systems (*Ibid.*: 15).

In fact, as noted above, base salaries often represented only a portion of the total revenue of civil servants, alongside a variety of other official and unofficial, public and private sources of income – including a complex web of allowances, benefits, per diems, the unofficial perquisites of office, as well as economic activities exercised outside the public sector. Insofar as wage bills in African countries came to absorb a rising share of total government expenditures, to the expense of critically needed capital expenditures, the issue warranted urgent attention (Lindauer, Meesook & Suebsaeng 1988: 21). The presence of salary supplements, allowances, and fringe benefits (many of them in kind) meant that the formal budget and wage bill provided only a distorted picture of wage costs in government (Schiller 1990: 96), which in turn led the World Bank towards increasing scrutiny of public wage systems.

Public wage, allowance and salary supplement systems in African bureaucracies

Indeed, several reports recognised that the decline of real wages was ‘often cushioned by elaborate allowances or non-wage benefit structures that in some countries have become an increasingly important part of the overall compensation package’ (Nunberg 1988: 3-4). Schiller argued that for many civil servants, wages may have constituted as little as 25% of total remuneration (*Ibid.*: 12-13), with state-funded non-wage benefits including housing allowances, family and health benefits, pension plans, life and health insurance schemes, travel per diems, transport, position-specific salary supplements, etc. (Schiller 1990: 91-92). To these should be added the presence of donor-funded per diems in African

administrations (Smith 2003; Ridde 2012), which are not limited to salary supplements, but encompass less transparent sources of payment (sitting allowances for training, per diems for travel, and cars for officials working in donor projects) (Nunberg & Taliercio 2012: 1974). Equally important are national per diem systems, paid out of domestic budgets, which have seeped into African government practice since their inception in development projects in the mid-1970s. Per diems, in this respect, are considered to have come to be used as an unofficial salary supplement to increase motivation, frequently differentiated by seniority and hierarchy (Nkamleu & Kamgnia 2014).

Why were salary supplements progressively expanded and scaled up in African public administrations? To answer this question requires delving into the uses and functions they fulfil, beyond the frequently encountered justification that salary supplements were a means to increase motivation, and later, under the impetus of New Public Management ideas, to reward productivity. While, on the one hand, allowances have a long history harking back to the colonial era³, on the other it is evident that rewards other than the base salary were a privileged means for African governments to stimulate remunerations in a context where downward pressures on the wage bill were mounting (*Ibid*: 9). At the same time, the discretion such rewards afforded also enabled the allocation of remuneration in non-standard ways, and far more unequal patterns; this also evidently altered relations of authority within public administrations, including in terms of increasing the salience of personal loyalties. For these reasons, and more importantly, the complex and opaque web of rewards and allowances – on which data is scarce and particularly difficult to access (*Ibid.*) – also had the effect of introducing a degree of informalisation within bureaucracies, a point we develop below.

Indeed, as governments have frequently used ‘back-door mechanisms to differentiate rewards’, the outcome has been ‘an opaque, difficult-to-administer web of non-salary fees and allowances, bonuses, and nonwage benefits’ (Nunberg & Taliercio 2012: 1971). For example, in both Burkina Faso and Senegal, in the face of declining real salaries for all groups, governments increasingly used allowances and in-kind benefits to complement pay. However, these benefits were selectively bestowed to certain groups, such as teachers, health workers, and magistrates, under the pressure of these groups’ trade unions; and the political and public service elites also increased their remunerations, through additional allowances and in-kind benefits (Kiragu, Mukandala & Morin 2004: 111).

But that is not all. In Senegal in the 1980s – a case that presents many similarities with contemporary DRC – premiums were paid for each individual job category, usually without a clear functional justification (Nunberg 1988: 12-13). A World Bank report on Senegal’s public wage system – where allowances totalled 26.9% of the wage bill in 1984 (Schiller 1990: 91) – noted how aside salaries, a significant portion of the wage bill was ‘a crazy quilt of special deductions and allowances’, some of which benefitted one person (bicycle allowances), others benefitting a class of employees (such as customs staff receiving an *indemnité de douanes* or teachers receiving an *indemnité d’enseignement*), others benefitting out of the ordinary activities (performance bonuses such as *primes de rendement*) or dangerous work (firemen receiving a *prime de risque*) (Bloch 1985: 25-26, 39).

However, despite bringing to the fore the salience of non-wage salary supplements and allowances within African public wage systems, the literature produced during the structural adjustment years is saddled

³ The perks of colonial administrators, duly transferred to postcolonial bureaucratic elites following independence, leads Olivier de Sardan to speak of “privilegism” as an enduring colonial legacy (Olivier de Sardan 2021: 247; Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2014: 40-41; Olivier de Sardan 2004: 146).

with important analytical gaps. There are no studies providing detailed descriptions of how wage bills are structured through salary supplements, few discussions of the micro-politics which underpin and drive such systems, or hardly any studies drawing out the analytical implications of public wage systems. This is what this paper sets out to do for the DRC. But before we do so, we first look at the socio-anthropological literature at the justifications for salary supplements; and secondly, at how these salary supplements are a driver for the informalisation of the state.

Interrogating the justifications for salary supplements

Aside the literature on African public wage systems produced as part of structural adjustment policies, the issue of salary supplements has also been analysed by socio-anthropologists working on African public bureaucracies. Taking the chronic inadequacy of civil service salaries in relation to the social pressures which surround civil servants as a starting point, Olivier de Sardan underlines the extent to which West African public bureaucracies such as that of Niger are characterised by a ‘frenetic quest of financial “motivations”’, underpinned by a ‘culture of gratification’: this local notion of ‘motivation’ – which means *prime*, compensation, financial encouragement – has become a fully-fledged ‘practical norm’. Civil servants are engaged in a perennial hunt for such *primes*, whose salience only increases the higher one climbs into the hierarchy (Olivier de Sardan 2014a: 40; Blundo 2015a: 21-23). Thus, salary supplements are considered a legitimate entitlement, a resource up for grabs, and certainly not as a complement meant to reward efficiency or excellence, as its initiators intend. As such, *primes* (or salary supplements) are part of a wider environment where, insofar as civil service salaries are insufficient, various formal and informal strategies are used to increase one’s income, at the expense of the state, service users, or donor projects (Olivier de Sardan 2014a: 40). In such a setting, any additional effort demanded of a civil servant – irrespective of the actual amount of real work – is meant to lead to the payment of a *prime*, short of which the activity at hand will be either poorly executed or de facto boycotted (*Ibid.*).

In this context, and following Achille Mbembe’s seminal work on African postcolonies, Blundo and Olivier de Sardan note that ‘salaries represent an “allocation of purely ascriptive nature”’ (Mbembe 2001: 45-46, cited in Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006: 62; see also Mbembe & Roitman 1995: 349-351):

[Salaries] do not reward productivity and therefore do not establish any correlation between what is earned and the work carried out; they are more an instrument through which the state purchases obedience and gratitude. (...) [I]n contexts characterised by the absence of policies in the area of social security and by economic insecurity, the salary is equated with privilege. (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006: 62)

In this vein, and in light of Olivier de Sardan’s (2014) empirical observations on Niger, the link tying remuneration to motivation, as a reward meant to stimulate productivity (with remuneration understood as comprising both formal salaries and supplements), appears largely fractured. Mbembe’s view of public sector remunerations as ‘the purchase of obedience and gratitude’ in African post-colonial settings points (Mbembe 2001: 45-46) precisely towards the aforementioned altering of relations of authority within administrations, and the increased importance of personal loyalties associated with discretionary allocation of rewards and perks. Mbembe’s important insight, though, invites some qualifications; we return to this issue below, after introducing our DRC payroll data.

Salary supplements as a driver of informalisation within civil services

Salary supplements are also an important driver of the informalisation process that affects African public administrations. If studies of informalisation in African administrations (Blundo 2006; Bierschenk 2008) have highlighted the extent to which processes of informal privatisation have seeped into the functioning of interface bureaucracies, via processes of brokerage and intermediation, our paper shows that informalisation can equally affect back office bureaucracies, judged from the vantage point of violations of the state's own regulations. Kate Meagher defines the informal economy as 'income generating activities that operate outside of the regulatory framework of the state' (Meagher 2010: 14); as we argue below, in the DRC a large portion of employment and public sector pay operates outside the state's own regulatory framework. In the same vein, the haphazard nature of management of state personnel documented by several studies (Olivier de Sardan 2014b: 406; Blundo 2011; Olivier de Sardan 2014a; Olivier de Sardan et al. 2018) also points in the same direction, that is, the centrality of informalisation processes that arise from the wide gap between official rules and practical norms (Olivier de Sardan 2015; De Herdt & Olivier de Sardan 2015).

Furthermore, the reliance on non-salary components of remuneration of which salary supplements are part also reflects an informal layer of negotiation, diffuse loyalties and protection, on top of a rule-based logic to remunerate personnel. Salary supplements add an additional layer of accountabilities, imposing their own logic on the functioning of everyday administrative processes. This layer inevitably signals perhaps the most fundamental aspect of the informalization of public sector jobs and pay: the informalization of power relationships (the concept of multiple accountabilities is particularly salient here, Olivier de Sardan 2014b: 425; Blundo 2015b). The question 'who decides' therefore becomes an important one to predict who gets to be appointed or to access particular types of salary supplements.

This layer of informality surrounding pay within African administrations can be apprehended via several lenses. A first one consists in the distinction made between 'juicy' ministries where lucrative opportunities for commissions, embezzlement and salary supplements are numerous, as opposed to 'dry' ministries deemed 'empty shells' with no opportunities for gain (Olivier de Sardan 2014a: 14, 70-71; Olivier de Sardan, Ali Bako & Harouna 2018 : 16). Thus far, however, 'juicy' posts have frequently been associated with frontline field posts, where there is contact with public service users and a high density of transactions, such as customs or traffic police (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2001: 23; Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006). As we will document in the following sections, back office bureaucracies – where there is no connection to general publics – can provide equally salient distinctions between 'dry' and 'juicy' administrative services.

Another example in relation to public sector pay consists in the informalised means through which salary supplements are pursued, including via practices of lobbying, fuelling unequal distributions across categories of staff, and the discretion at play with regards to beneficiaries. For instance, research on Senegal's non-wage allowance and benefits system has shown how this fuelled resentment along less favoured categories of staff (Nunberg 1988: 12-13). Similar dynamics are at stake in Niger's public bureaucracy, where the distribution of salary supplements is the source of much tension in administrative services, with lower-level staff being highly suspicious of their superiors, often considered to have pocketed them on their behalf (Olivier de Sardan 2014a: 40). Finally, insofar as obtaining allowances or salary supplements involves recognition of a special status for categories of civil servants, in Senegal

groups of administrative personnel devoted inordinate amounts of time lobbying to obtain those, in what amounted – in the words of a World Bank consultant – to rent-seeking activity (Bloch 1985: 40).

Contextualising ‘wageless life’ and informalisation in sub-Saharan Africa

These observations can also be placed in their broader context, in light of what Denning (2010) refers to as ‘wageless life’. Indeed, wageless life – typically seen ‘as a situation of lack, the space of exclusion: the unemployed, the informal’ (*Ibid*: 80) – has historically preceded situations of formal salaried employment. From this standpoint, the coining of the term ‘informal sector’ in the early 1970s in Ghana and Kenya, ‘to reckon with the mass of wageless life in the newly independent Third World’, which appeared to sit outside ‘the categories of employment and unemployment alike’ (*Ibid*: 81-82), may be part of a far more universal history⁴, all the more so since the 1970s Great Recession, and the inroads of neoliberal policies, informalisation of work, and ‘the spectre of wageless life’, reemerged everywhere, including in the Global North (Denning 2010: 85). In the Global South, though, particularly in settings where formal economic activity provides but a small fraction of employment and sustenance for livelihoods, and where economies have been dislocated through economic crisis and political turmoil, states themselves have come to be subjected to, while also actively pursuing, far-reaching processes of informalisation. Following from the remarks above, this is the sense in which we employ the term, highlighting the extent to which the administration itself has come to operate ‘outside the regulatory framework of the state’ (Meagher 2010: 14).

At the same time, the very distinction between of the formal and informal has raised a number of objections, considered an ‘empty signifier’ (Baaz, Olsson & Verweijen 2018: 3), occluding the participation of ‘formal’ actors in informal activity (voiding these concepts of analytical clout, Rubbers 2007: 382), some advocating for the abandonment of its ‘tired dualism’ (Standing 2014: 973; Rubbers 2024) – although as readily acknowledged, compelling alternative formulations are lacking (Denning 2010). As such, despite being repeatedly questioned by social scientists, the purposes the formal/informal dichotomy fulfils from a policy standpoint suggests it may be illusory to seek its discarding (Rubbers 2024: 14-15). While in agreement with the points raised by these critiques, our usage of the term informalisation aims to highlight an ongoing dynamic, rather than a fixed quality or endpoint; equally, this formulation allows to highlight, from an actor-oriented point of view, the increase in vulnerabilities that the process triggers among those most subjected to informalisation processes (Meagher 2010). Finally, when it comes to the participation of ‘formal’ actors such as state officials in informal (economic) activity, much emphasis is placed on interface bureaucrats in service delivery contexts; our contribution, however, aims to highlight similar patterns in settings associated with far more formality, namely back-office bureaucracies.

Before turning to the case of the DRC’s central administration, a few remarks on how informalisation may be apprehended in certain African contexts are warranted. To begin with, it should be borne in mind that

⁴ In fact, ‘wageless life’ traits have long been prevalent in locales associated with the development of capitalism in Europe. As noted by Gauthier de Villers (1992), drawing on Fernand Braudel’s famous trilogy of works on capitalism, and cited in Ayimpam (2014: 21), the development of petty and rudimentary economic activities, associated with Third World informal sectors, was a banal phenomenon in processes of urbanisation in Europe too: wherever city growth was not followed by a flourishing of industry, urban poverty expanded, and in its wake petty economic activities multiplied, in the form of infra-economies centred on survival (much as was the case in Kinshasa during the second world war).

all bureaucracies – locales of formality *par excellence* – nevertheless constantly produce a degree of informality around them, which is in fact essential to their functioning: this is necessary to ease, humanise, and enable the operations of a bureaucratic system. As noted by Olivier de Sardan (2021), the problem of ‘the gap’ between official and practical norms is universal, as has long been recognised by organisational sociology: ‘webs of social relations’, or structures functioning according to processes different from ‘official organisational charts’ are the norm everywhere (Granovetter 1985: 502); ‘rules are often violated, decisions are often unimplemented’, and when they are, uncertain consequences ensue (Meyer & Rowan 1977: 342-343). Further, the strict application of formal rules would generate inconsistencies⁵, and informal working of technical interdependencies in organisations help smooth their functioning (*Ibid*: 357-358).

However, a set of differences can be highlighted between certain African locales and northern European contexts. As Thomas Bierschenk has noted, if ‘all administrative apparatuses develop informalization strategies as a means of relief’ (Bierschenk 2008: 105-106), certain types of informalisation can be distinguished: in his analysis of Benin’s legal system, he draws attention to ‘centrally controlled administrative informalisation’ and ‘pragmatic informalisation’; while they are both at play in these locales, administrative informalisation tends to be more prevalent in Europe (often deployed as a means to ease pressures on the administration), while pragmatic informalisation (which develops spontaneously) dominates in Benin (*Ibid*: 105-106, 121-122). In the latter, as well as in other African settings in West Africa, ‘the inadequacy of official rules and regulations, which are often ill-adapted to reality, necessitates the production of informal norms which actually enable the minimal functioning of the apparatuses (...) albeit in a negative feedback loop, intensifying its functional problems’ (Bierschenk 2014: 238; Bierschenk 2008).

Our paper will build further on these insights. In the sections that follow, we show civil service remunerations in the DRC both reflecting the aforementioned fracture between remuneration and motivation, while also acknowledging the various informalisation logics at play in the allocation of salary supplements, which combine negotiations with political authorities, civil servant mobilisations from below, as well as power struggles. We demonstrate these points below through our description and overview of the Congolese public wage system, and through an in-depth analysis of particular salary supplement sub-systems within sectors of the civil service.

Civil service remunerations in the DRC

The trends described above – a substantial drop in public sector real salaries and compensation over time through the rise of uneven allowances – resonate deeply with the historical evolution of the Congolese civil service (for a fuller overview, see Moshonas & De Herdt 2021).

⁵ As shown by work-to-rule industrial action that aims to slow down organisations. An analysis of the German civil service (‘a patronage bureaucracy’) by a leading organisational sociologist cited by Bierschenk (2014: 238-239) concludes that “*a completely objective system of promotion liberated from all micropolitics, formalized and mathematicised*” would involve considerable losses of efficiency for the public administration and actually cause its collapse into subsystems as the administration is reliant on “*a high degree of group cohesion*”.

Historical trends within the wage bill

Indeed, under the combined weight of economic crisis and structural adjustment since the mid-1970s, public sector real wages plummeted: the index of real salaries for civil servants fell from 100 in 1970 to 20.3 in 1980 (Kankwenda 2005: 165), and further to 10.9 in 1989 (De Herdt & Marysse 1996: 57). In 1995, civil servants enjoyed a salary of no more than the equivalent of \$5 per month (Rubbers 2007: 321; Economist Intelligence Unit 1998: 14), while in 2003 the lowest administrative rank of office messenger (*huissier*) received \$4 and directors \$35 (Economist Intelligence Unit 2003: 31; Groupe d'expertise congolaise de Belgique 2001: 68; PNUD 2015: 86-87). In fact, while public sector remunerations represented 53.4% of domestic revenues in 1975, by 1980 this had dropped to 40.3%, 29.7% in 1983, and a mere 16% in 1986 – highlighting the extent to which the Mobutu regime had effectively shifted a disproportionate share of adjustment costs onto civil servants (Bloch 1986: 12-13).

At the same time, it is worth mentioning that with the withdrawal of state funding in the 1980s and 1990s (first following advice from the World Bank and IMF, then by the de facto implosion of the budget), schools and health facilities effectively became tax points levying “parafiscal” revenue (De Herdt and Titeca 2019; Williams and Ghonda 2012). That is, instead of funding flowing from the public budget downwards towards service delivery, a system of bottom-up financial flows emerged, whereby households subsidised not just the functioning of these services via payments (like school fees or user fees more generally) but also the state administration as such. Thus, for branches of the administration that were interface bureaucracies, remunerations were – and still are, to this day – also complemented by bottom-up financial flows, extracted from service users.

Here, the remarks of Evariste Boshab (1998) on civil servant remunerations in Congo/Zaire can help contextualise these trends further. Reflecting on the low levels at which remunerations were kept in the colonial period for Congolese subjects⁶, and drawing on patrimonial theory, Boshab goes on to note how, after independence, the level and functions of remunerations in the public sector are best explained by political relations: civil servants did not serve ‘the state’, or the general interest, but the chief, whose interests supplant those of an absent public sphere. In his reading, closely attuned to the remarks of Achille Mbembe above, civil servants do not have formal remunerations, but receive gifts from the chief’s largesse, hence why no objective criteria were involved in fixing their levels (Boshab 1998: 747-748). This, in turn, helps explain why the incentives of civil servants are geared towards acting against legality, corruption, and living off service users, without much scope for disciplinary action (*Ibid*: 749-750). Despite its relevance, this line of reasoning invites further qualification, however. As we show below, the evolution of civil service pay is not simply a top-down affair at the discretion of political authorities, but is also shaped by bottom-up pressures and mobilisations from civil servants.

The period of democratic transition from 2003 onwards

⁶ According to his analysis, this was due to colonial thinking: civil servant remunerations in the early colonial period were kept deliberately low for low-level Congolese staff due to fears that the inherent ‘laziness’ of natives would render them prone to alcohol consumption, and for this reason, where possible, payment in kind was preferable; the remunerations of the *évolués* working in the civil service at lower rungs – who were seen with suspicion, and were never co-opted in the restricted circles of colonial domination – in the later colonial period, were also kept at low levels (Boshab 1998: 745-746).

As we shall see, it is only during the democratic transition of 2003-2006, which was marked by the re-engagement of International Financial Institutions and donors, a gradual consolidation and expansion of the domestic budget, as well as substantial aid flows, that public sector remunerations – both base salaries and salary supplements (*primes*)⁷ – started to rise again. As such, the issue of civil service remunerations is of crucial importance, insofar as the wage bill absorbs around one third of the state's domestic budget (RDC/Cour des Comptes 2015: 5-6; World Bank 2015: 6)⁸. However, the bulk of public sector remuneration increases for many categories of civil servants in recent years has tended to come from increases in allowances (or salary supplements), rather than salaries.

The political economic rationale behind the expansion of the system of salary supplements since 2003, while base salaries have been kept at a relatively low level, rests in the discretion and flexibility it has afforded. There has been no motivation to raise the base salary substantially because of the implications it would carry: the base salary, by law, is the same for all civil servants, and therefore increases would have profound budgetary implications (interview, senior Ministry of Budget official, 21.09.2018); equally, base salaries have statutory consequences (insofar as they are the basis on which pensions and end-of-career allowances are calculated). For this reason, remuneration increases – which has been a means to deal with turmoil in the public sector during the 2003-2006 transition – has been achieved by gradually complementing low salaries with salary supplements (Verheijen & Mabi Mulumba 2008: 4). However, as we shall see, this has come at the cost of instilling high degrees of inequality across institutions in terms of access to salary supplements, whose correspondence with productivity is far from evident.

As noted in one study, wage increases took place in 2007, when the housing and transport allowances were integrated in the base salary (Herdeschee et al. 2012: 33). However, this did not eliminate the system of allowances that has been progressively expanded since 2003, which has come to constitute a vested interest in the institutions deriving most advantages from it. As one World Bank report on this issue noted:

A first step in the rationalisation of the public wage system was introduced in 2007, bringing the share of the base salary in total remuneration from 5% to around 40-55%, independently of the rank and of the receipt of other allowances. But wage reform has remained a dead letter since then. This is because the next step would be to clarify the problem of specific allowances, on the basis of which some officials can obtain up to twice or three times the equivalent of their base salary, despite the official statutory rule capping allowances to not more than a third of the salary. These specific allowances are paid above all at the ministries of budget and finance, as well to high ranking civil servants in other ministries. It is therefore difficult to imagine what motivation there could be to reform this system, especially in the ministries that benefit the most from it (Verheijen et al. 2012: 109).

Indeed, a wide range of specific allowances exist in many ministries and represent substantial portions of the remuneration of civil servants, sometimes constituting the equivalent of over ten times the base salary

⁷ *Primes* existed already before, sometimes as high as the wage itself (Vieux 1970: 61; Vieux 1974; Gould 1980), and were also used in the mid-1980s to compensate the decline of real wages during the structural adjustment years (interview, public sector trade union official, 04.04.2016), but had dried up in the 1990s due to the state of public finances and the shrinking of the domestic budget.

⁸ In fact, remunerations in the state budget are in principle capped to 35% of domestic revenues or 7% of GDP, according to the norm of budgetary sustainability (RDC/Ministère du Budget 2017: 22), although this has at times been exceeded in recent years.

(Herdeschee et al. 2012: 33). In fact, it is partly under the inspiration of New Public Management principles, that the state itself has started to distribute salary supplements to administrative entities, either in the form of *'primes permanentes'* so as to attach an extra value to a particular service, or in the form of a salary supplement to reward a particular performance. In some cases, salary supplements can amount to 90-95% of total pay (Verheijen & Mabi Mulumba 2008: 4). These salary supplements are administered by the Ministry of Budget and independently from the Ministry of Public service, which adds to the 'grey zone' or complexity of 'becoming' a fully registered civil servant (Moshonas et al 2022). However, a major problem ensuing from this is that, given the predominance of salary supplements in civil servants' remuneration, the latter have become a prime driver of inequality between ministries and departments, with highly strategic departments better off (for a general overview, IBNS Consulting 2016; Moshonas, De Herdt & Titeca 2019).

A twilight zone of statuses

As we will see below, 'juicy' institutions and ministries involved in revenue-generation or funding-allocation, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Budget, are in a far better position in terms of salary supplements, particularly when compared to relatively 'barren' ministries where these are inexistent. This fragmentation of the public wage system is complicated further by the existence of multiple Statutes ('special' Statutes for some categories of personnel, such as for academics and the police, and over 27 'particular Statutes' for other categories, such as medical doctors; Morganti 2007: 3) beyond the General Statute of the civil service. A conclusion from a World Bank report captures the situation well:

'The pay system within the public administration has evolved into a constellation of subsystems that are drifting ever farther apart, concealing privileges and increasing opacity, fragmenting the Civil Service, and increasing disparity of treatment and distinct staff ranking systems' (Morganti 2007: 39)

In other words, the process of fragmentation and informalisation of public sector pay has given way to a twilight zone of statuses, operating in large part 'outside the regulatory framework of the state'. This is true of the rifts existing across occupational categories, with wide discrepancies between ministries, as well as within categories of staff employed in particular ministries, for example in the health sector between medical doctors vis-à-vis other health workers, or in the ministry of higher education, between university professors and administrative personnel. It also applies to discrepancies within categories of staff, depending on whether a civil servant is fully registered and recognised by the ministry of Public Service, an unrecognised *'Nouvelle Unité'* deprived of a civil service registration number, or fully or partially integrated in the payroll (*'mécanisé'*). The fact that salary supplements can be awarded to non-registered civil servants, in contrast to the base salary, which can only be received by registered civil servants, complicates the picture further.

This fragmentation of civil service remunerations harks back to the 1972-1973 civil service reform, which decentralised human resource management and replaced the Public Service Department (as ministries were then called) by a permanent commission (Vieux 1974: 17, 90). This resulted in Departments establishing their own exceptional salary grid scales (*sous-barèmes exceptionnels*), thereby differentiating pay beyond what was envisaged in the civil service salary grid scale. Even though the Public Service Department was re-instated in 1981, several Departments held on to their advantageous remuneration

packages (Bloch 1986: 6). In addition to this, as noted in a report on Zaire’s public wage system, aside salaries, a wide variety of non-wage allowances – which did not feature in the wage bill, and tended to favour the most senior civil servants – widened the gap across ranks: housing, official cars, gas, per diems for international and domestic travel, etc. Most General Secretaries (the highest administrative rank) and Directors had official cars; while in some ministries, such as the ministry of Finance and the ministry of Planning, Division Chiefs too, under the pretext that the work undertaken by these senior officials was so important that they should not depend on unreliable public transport (Bloch 1986: 14).

A consequence of this de facto decentralisation of state employment – which endures to this day, with each sector acting autonomously – is that most employees in the public sector are operating ‘outside the regulatory framework of the state’ insofar as they have not been recruited according to the state’s own regulations, which are widely violated. That is, most civil servants have been hired outside of the official channels of recruitment organized by the ministry of Public Service; the way in which they make their way ‘up’ towards a regular and regularly paid position materializes largely via networks of acquaintances and protectors until (and until well after) being officially registered and paid a full salary as well as salary supplements. ‘Outside the regulatory framework of the state’ also applies to prevalent practices around salary supplements, insofar as a large number of those rest upon uncertain legal foundations. For example, the civil service Statute (whether the previous 1981 edition or the current 2016 version) only officially recognises a limited number of *primes* – 6 in total – and caps the total they can represent to a maximum of two thirds of the base salary (art. 48 of the 2016 Statute).

The evolution of public sector pay

The evolution of civil service (base) salaries is pictured in table 2 below, showing clearly their sharp decline in the 1990s and early 2000s, and their recovery since then (judged from the perspective of the least paid).

Table 1: Evolution of base salaries in USD, 1992-2018

	1992	2000	2013	2018
General Secretary	107	71	103.6	122
Director	79	34.6	101.8	120.4
Division Chief		28.3	98.8	119.3
Desk Chief	70	18.5	96.6	117.5
Administrative officer 1st class (ATA1)		15.2	93.6	113.1
Administrative officer 2nd class (ATA2)		13	91.8	111.6
Administrative agent 1st class	32		90.5	110.4
Administrative agent 2nd class			89.6	109.7
Auxiliary Agent 1st class		8.5	89	109.1
Auxiliary Agent 2nd class		7.8	81.6	102.9
Office messenger	11	7	75.8	100.7

Sources: authors' calculations based on Groupe d'expertise congolaise de Belgique (2001: 68); PNUD (2015: 86-87); RDC/Ministère de la Fonction Publique (2020)⁹

However, for certain categories of personnel, total remuneration has been increased substantially in the years leading up to 2018, if additional allowances are included. This has been the case for medical doctors (Maini 2015; Ravez et al. 2019, around \$1.000 per month for the most qualified), magistrates (Rubbers & Gallez 2012, upwards of \$1.100 per month), political appointees in ministerial cabinets and political institutions (Marysse 2015), and university professors (Poncelet et al. 2015, around \$2.000 per month), as well as much more modestly, teachers (De Herdt & Titeca 2016)¹⁰. The same applies to certain parts of civil service personnel, who can receive a variety of salary supplements specific to the sector they work in, their ministry, their department, and the functions they exercise, as is explained in depth below.

Types of salary supplements in the DRC's central civil service

Beyond the base salary – harmonized for all civil servants and indexed on rank with a high compression ratio – a variety of salary supplements exist which are highly differentiated across ministries and even across departments in a given ministry. It is important to note from the outset, though, that if only registered civil servants (*fonctionnaires immatriculés*) included in the payroll (*mécanisés*) are entitled to receipt of a salary, this is not the case for salary supplements: even non-registered civil servants (referred to as *Nouvelles Unités*) can be included in the salary supplements payroll (*alignés sur les primes*). Table 2 below provides an indicative typology of types of salary supplements, illustrated through specific examples as well as their magnitude. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, it is based on data derived from a set of twelve ministries (detailed below), thus providing a relatively comprehensive overview of the differentiation across public sector remunerations.

⁹ The Congolese franc went from CDF 930 to \$1 in December 2015 (a level it had kept since 2010) to CDF 1.635 in December 2018. This currency depreciation was driven by the slowdown in the global economy, which led to a steady fall in the prices of the main export products (copper, cobalt, etc.) and foreign currency reserves. In the text, we provide estimates in USD at the old rate of CDF 930 for sums referring to the period up to December 2015, and estimates in USD at the rate of CDF 1.635 for sums referring to the period up to 2018 (on the economic slowdown in these years, see World Bank 2016, and on the evolution of the exchange rate, see RDC/Banque Centrale du Congo 2020).

¹⁰ On these increases, see for example RDC/Ministère du Budget (2014).

Table 2: Types of cumulable civil servant remunerations (up until 2018)

Types of remuneration	Beneficiaries	Sub-types and examples	Magnitude per month (2013-2018)	Source of funding
Base salary	All registered civil servants (<i>personnel immatriculé</i>) included in the payroll (<i>mécanisé</i>)	Harmonised across the civil service and indexed on rank	Between \$104 (<i>Secrétaire Général</i>) and \$76 (<i>huissier</i>) (2013)	Wage bill
Ministerial permanent salary supplement (sometimes also called <i>primes institutionnelles</i>)	Paid to all civil servants working in a given ministry, but not in all ministries	The <i>prime spécifique et de retrocession combinée</i> , paid in 2017 to all personnel of the Ministry of Budget and Ministry of Finance	Around \$750 for the rank of ATA1 (2017/2018)	Wage bill
		The occupational risk allowance (<i>prime de risque professionnel</i>) paid to all Ministry of Health staff	Between \$722-\$1.444 (medical doctors), \$52 (unqualified nurses) (2018)	Wage bill
		The <i>prime spécifique des agents et cadres de la fonction publique</i> , paid in 2018 to all personnel of the Ministry of Public Service	Around \$250 for an ATA1 in 2018	Wage bill
		The <i>prime Lukubama</i> received by all personnel of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.	\$43 for a division chief (2018)	SECOPE envelope
Department-specific permanent salary supplement	Paid to the civil servants working in a particular department, usually depend on the activities of carried out.	The <i>prime d'encadrement de la bancarisation</i> paid to all Payroll Department personnel of the Ministry of Budget.	\$688 for ATA1 (2018), higher ranks much more	Wage bill
		The <i>prime spécifique</i> received by the personnel of the central administration of the <i>Service de Contrôle de la Paie des Enseignants</i> (SECOPE) of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education	Between \$1.573 for a director and \$780 for an ATA1 (2018)	Wage bill
Retrocession-based salary supplement	Only concerns ministries that oversee revenue-generating activities, though not all such	<i>Prime de retrocession</i> at Ministry of State Enterprises (Ministère du Portefeuille)	\$125 for director (2017)	Retrocession-based revenue

	ministries disburse them. Fluctuate in function of revenues generated	<i>Prime de taxe statistique</i> at Ministry of Hydrocarbons (<i>Ministère des Hydrocarbures</i>).	\$156-\$212 for ATA1 (2017),	Retrocession-based revenue
		The prime DGRAD at Ministry of Hydrocarbons (<i>Ministère des Hydrocarbures</i>)	\$6-\$11 for ATA1 (2017)	Retrocession-based revenue
		<i>Prime royauté de marge distribuable</i> at Ministry of Hydrocarbons (<i>Ministère des Hydrocarbures</i>).	\$250-\$437 (2017), but paid irregularly.	Retrocession-based revenue
Performance-based salary supplement	Graduates of the <i>École Nationale de l'Administration (Énarques)</i> or World Bank-funded Junior Professional Officer (JPO) scheme.	<i>Prime de performance des Énarques</i>	Around \$837 (until the end of 2017)	Treasury through BCECO funds until 2017
		<i>Prime de performance</i> of Junior Professional Officers (JPOs)	Between \$900-\$1300 for JPOs (until September 2017), around \$312 since then.	World Bank until September 2017, wage bill thereafter
Category-related permanent salary supplement	Paid on the basis of the professional category of these civil servants.	The <i>prime spéciale et spécifique</i> received by civil servants recruited to staff the new administrative departments created through the ongoing civil service reform initiative (<i>structures standards</i>)	Between \$375 for an ATA1 and \$812 for a director (2018).	Wage bill since 2018
		The <i>prime des administrateurs civils</i> (received by, amongst others, <i>Énarques</i>).	Depending on rank, between \$468-\$515 (2018)	Wage bill since 2018
Task-specific permanent non-salary supplement (<i>primes non-permanentes</i>)	Supplements paid for ad hoc, specific tasks	Supplement for labour-intensive tasks (<i>prime pour travaux intensifs</i>)	Depends on the activity carried out, and indexed on rank	Ministerial functioning costs
User fee-derived salary supplement	Frontline public servants in contact with service users	The <i>prime locale</i> paid to frontline health workers in hospitals or health centers, or <i>primes</i> paid to teachers on the basis of school fees	Highly variable, ranging from a few dollars to hundreds of dollars, depending on facility revenues	User fees incurred by patients or school fees incurred by parents

Among different types of salary supplements, the *prime permanente* (sometimes also referred to as *prime institutionnelle*) is paid out to all civil servants working in a given ministry and/or a specific department (this being the case particularly in the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Budget), or belonging to a particular category. In addition to this, the ministries which generate revenue collected by the tax agency *Direction Générale Des Recettes Administratives, Judiciaires, Domaniales Et De Participations* (DGRAD) on their behalf, can pay out salary supplements drawn from the amounts retroceded¹¹. The last two types of salary supplements considered (*prime de performance* for *Énarques* and JPOs) and the *prime spéciale et spécifique* or *prime des administrateurs civils* (received by the *standardistes* or *administrateurs civils*) are paid on the basis of the special status of these corps, both of which are the product of the ongoing civil service reform project being implemented since 2014. Finally, aside salary supplements paid every month and integrated in the wage bill, there also exist task-specific *primes non-permanentes*, which are paid out of ministerial functioning expenses – an overview of which, however, lies outside the scope of this paper (for an analysis, see Moshonas, De Herdt & Titeca 2019).

It is worth noting that these different salary supplements can be cumulated: in 2017, a civil servant freshly graduated from the DRC's National School of Administration (ENA-RDC) working in the Ministry of Budget's Payroll Department would receive, aside his base salary, his *prime de performance*, the *prime spécifique et de retrocession combinée* common to all agents of the Ministry of Budget, and also his department's salary supplement (*prime d'encadrement de la bancarisation*). This system obviously instils huge degrees of inequality and disparity in remunerations, particularly when 'juicy' institutions are contrasted with less endowed ones: an *Énarque* working in the Ministry of Culture and Arts, bereft of salary supplements, would only be receiving his base salary and his *prime de performance*, for instance. A recently recruited but unregistered civil servant (known as a *Nouvelle Unité*) who would not yet be on the payroll, would be bereft of a base salary and, if working in a barren ministry, would have to survive on the opportunities afforded by his office, among which task-specific *primes non-permanentes*.

Additionally, while most of these types of salary supplements – apart from the *primes non-permanentes* – feature in the wage bill and are paid on a monthly basis, not all of those are paid through the banking sector¹². Some are indeed paid manually (by '*maboko banque*', *maboko* meaning arm in Lingala) – particularly the retrocession-based salary supplements which vary on a monthly basis depending on revenue. In the case of manual payment, the money is distributed at the ministry's level once retrieved from the Central Bank. The following sections provide an in-depth look of the landscape of salary supplements within different institutions.

Overview of the system of salary supplements

¹¹ Even though not all ministries that do collect such revenue do so.

¹² In 2011, the *bancarisation* reform was launched, which introduced the payment of civil service remunerations through the commercial banking sector. Its coverage in 2016 was fairly extensive, with over 56% of civil servants paid via the banking sector (RDC/Cour des Comptes 2016: 15; Brandt & De Herdt 2020). While *bancarisation* has allowed to curb the abuses previously associated with the system of manual payment of remunerations via the system of public accountants, it has by no means eradicated the issues afflicting payroll management (such as ghost workers or embezzlement of remunerations), but rather displaced its political economy (for a discussion, see Moshonas 2019a).

On the basis of data derived from our set of twelve ministries, we can distinguish between the following types of institutions: a) ministries endowed with permanent ministerial salary supplements (*primes institutionnelles* or *primes permanentes*), b) ministries concerned by salary supplements paid from retrocession-based revenue, and c) ministries bereft of salary supplements.

Among the ministries paying permanent ministerial salary supplements to their personnel, the ministries of Finance and Budget stand out, in terms of the magnitude these represent, as is clear from a comparison with the Ministry of Public Service¹³. While the Ministry of Health also provides important salary supplements to *some* of its personnel (such as medical doctors and qualified health professionals), the distribution of its sectoral salary supplement, the occupational risk allowance, varies very widely, with personnel located at the bottom of the pyramid receiving very little.

Next are ministries benefitting from retrocession-based revenue out of which salary supplements are paid. However, instead of consisting in fixed amounts, these salary supplements fluctuate from period to period, depending on the revenues generated by the taxation agency *Direction Générale Des Recettes Administratives, Judiciaires, Domaniales Et De Participations* (DGRAD) for particular ministries which oversee revenue-generating activities (for an explanation of the role played by DGRAD, see Kambale Mirembe & De Herdt 2012: 260-261). Not only are these salary supplements not paid via the banking sector (*primes non-bancarisées*), but are typically decided at the discretion of the ministerial administration on the basis of retroceded revenue. In our sample, the Ministry of State Entreprises and Ministry of Hydrocarbons paid salary supplements to their ministry's staff on the basis of DGRAD revenue of varying magnitude, while other ministries receiving DGRAD revenue (the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Justice) did not¹⁴.

Finally, there are the ministries which appear entirely deprived of ministerial salary supplements. Cases in point, aside the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, include the Ministry of Technical and Professional Education, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Works, or the Ministry of Rural Development¹⁵. While the reasons that underpin this absence of salary supplements are not entirely clear, we can advance the following hypotheses. First, these ministries are all institutions that form part of what can be termed the 'policy space', i.e. the leeway the state has to exert influence and 'develop' society, which tends to be sidelined in budget composition and execution. Indeed, research on public financial management in the DRC has highlighted to the extent to which budget execution is

¹³ Moreover, according to the informed account of a civil servant working closely on human resource management in the Ministry of Public Service, in 2017-2018, out of a total of around 2.500 civil servants employed in that ministry (KPMG 2014: 56), only about a third received it (interview, Ministry of Public Service official, 28.06.2018). The reason for which some of the personnel did not receive this salary supplement partly had to do with lack of budgetary latitude, partly with the convoluted procedure through which payroll inclusion is achieved (Moshonas 2019a), but also with the way it has been managed by the ministry's administrative authorities (interview, Ministry of Public Service official, 28.06.2018).

¹⁴ However, even though these ministries did not pay salary supplements at the ministerial level, some departments (such as the *Direction Cultes et Associations* of the Ministry of Justice, which is in charge of the lucrative business of registering civil society organisations and churches) were reportedly disbursing retrocession-based salary supplements (interview, junior Ministry of Justice official, 27.09.2017).

¹⁵ Moreover, the Ministry of Rural Development, in addition to its 4.000 agents based in Kinshasa, oversees large numbers of personnel under its jurisdiction in the provinces (reportedly above 10.000), which makes disbursement of a ministerial salary supplement an all the more distant possibility, despite recent mobilisations and lobbying by that ministry's civil servants to that effect (interview, Ministry of Rural Development official, 12.09.2017).

skewed to the advantage of sovereign and security spending (institutions such as the presidency, prime minister's office, parliament and security services), to the detriment of others, especially social sectors and infrastructural investment (Williams & Ghonda 2012: 23-25, 36; Kambale Mirembe & De Herdt 2012: 274-275). Equally, this marginalization may also have to do with the remit of the work carried out by ministerial administrations, which can be either considered secondary, or whose attributions and tasks tend to be frequently taken over by ministerial cabinets and project implementation units. The case of the Ministry of Technical and Professional Education, separated from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in 2014, and attached to another ministry in 2018, falls in the former scenario, while the Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Works (where aside donor funding accorded to the *Cellule Infrastructure* of the ministry, which oversees major donor projects in the sector, the rest of the ministerial administration remains sidelined) in the latter.

Second, in the case of ministries receiving donor funding, which encompasses support for functioning expenses, material needs, and also salary supplements, an argument sometimes advanced is that it tends to disincentivise the Congolese government from disbursing the sums budgeted for the sector, because donor support is deemed sufficient – as noted by Trefon (2016: 31) for the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (in receipt of funds from various aid agencies, for instance for REDD+). This well-known problem of aid fungibility, however, does not seem to apply in the same way to the Ministry of Health, where government funding tends to overwhelmingly focus on remunerations (salaries and salary supplements, which absorbed 74% of current expenses paid from domestic revenue in 2013), to the detriment of investment budgets and functioning expenses. We return to the case of salary supplements in the special case of the Ministry of Health below.

A third reason underpinning the absence of salary supplements in these ministries, complementary to our hypothesis of the relative marginality of social sectors and 'policy space' institutions in budget execution, rests in the distance that separates them from sources of domestic funding. The proximity to sources of finance tends to define possibilities of access, and is a long-standing feature of the Congolese bureaucracy: as noted by Schatzberg in the late 1970s in his analysis of salary flows in Lisala (Equateur province), 'the closer a bureaucrat stands to the source of the funds, the better his chance of getting paid' (Schatzberg 1979: 169-170)¹⁶. This pattern continues to this day, and does not only hold at an individual level, but also at an institutional level: while institutions such as the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Budget are situated at the heart of processes of budgetary allocation and redistribution, others tend to suffer marginalization. After all, as noted in several studies¹⁷, access to ministerial credit lines is heavily politicised, with some institutions over-executing their budgets while others spend far less than their formal budgetary allowances; the strategic role of particular ministries, the political weight of their ministerial authorities (how well-connected the minister and his cabinet are), and the reach of the network of senior bureaucrats in a given ministry all appear to play a role in terms of access to ministerial credit lines, which in turn influences the availability of funds out of which salary supplements can be disbursed.

¹⁶ A similar conclusion was drawn by another author, noting the reticence of civil servants to be posted outside the capital city, preferring to stay close to the source, '*to avoid being forgotten*' (Ibula 1987: 144).

¹⁷ In the case of the Ghana, see Killick (2008), cited in Abdulai & Hickey (2016: 65); in the case of the DRC, Williams & Ghonda (2012) and De Herdt, Marivoet & Muhirigwa (2015).

The political economy of salary supplements

In this section, we zoom into greater detail in the distribution of salary supplements at the meso-level (between institutions, as well as departments within those) in a smaller sub-set of ministries within our sample, probing further the factors which underpin access. Doing so allows us to explore the different drivers of inter-departmental allocation of salary supplements, identifying three different, albeit neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive, logics at play in the system of public remunerations. These are the logic associated with administrative services functioning as technical nodes located at the heart of the expenditure chain, made up of the personal and political connections which tie particular administrative services to their ministerial authorities (Ministries of Finance and Budget); a logic of subservience of strategically positioned administrative services which oversee personnel database management at the sectoral level (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education) to high-level authorities as a means to control rents; and a logic of responsiveness to bottom-up pressures and mobilisations by civil servants as a driver of expansion of salary supplements (Ministry of Health).

The technical nodes: strategic positioning, proximity to the source and political linkages as drivers of salary supplements in the Ministries of Finance and Budget

As we already saw, in terms of permanent ministerial salary supplements and their magnitude, the ministries of Finance and Budget sit at the apex of our sample. However, in addition to this, as glimpsed from Table 2 above, certain administrative services within these two ministries are endowed with additional departmental salary supplements, concealing sharp differences within those two institutions. What, then, are the reasons behind the presence of higher salary supplements in these two ministries?

Perhaps the best place to start interrogating the factors which underlie this distribution is through the perceptions and reasons provided by actors themselves. Indeed, a justification often heard from people criticising the high salary supplements existing in the Ministries of Budget and Finance, usually with a tinge of acrimony, is framed as ‘the civil servants of these two ministries claim that they “produce” money, as opposed to other ministries’, suggesting the reason behind such large salary supplements derive from the ‘strategic’ nature of the institutions (and departments) handling money, generating revenue, or having financial implications. As explained by a junior civil servant working in one of these institutions (interview, 25.08.2017; see also Moshonas, De Herdt & Titeca 2019), these two ministries – due to their positioning at the heart of the expenditure chain – are able to benefit from a disproportionate share of resources: ‘they are in the kitchen, and serve themselves directly’¹⁸. Here, the proximity to the sources of finance appears to be a powerful determinant that enables these two institutions to disproportionately profit from the share of resources transiting through them.

The huge advantages bestowed on the staff of those ministries, and their favouring in the distribution of bonuses – which can total sums towering over the remunerations of personnel working in other

¹⁸ One of the reasons behind the envisaged reform of programme budgeting outlined in the Financial Law of 2011 (LOFIP), which aims to change the highly centralized way through which the expenditure chain functions and implies the decentralization of credit management at the level of each institution, is to curb and avoid these types of practices. However, the reform of the *budget-programme*, which was meant to take place in 2019, was postponed by moratorium until 2024 (see <https://actualite.cd/2018/06/13/rdc-le-senat-renvoie-2024-la-mise-en-place-de-la-nouvelle-loi-des-finances>, accessed 06.11.2024), reflecting both lack of preparation as well as political and bureaucratic resistance to the status quo.

institutions – are widely known among civil servants. For instance, even the lowest rank of ‘office messenger’ (*huissier*), working in the Ministry of Budget, can earn five times or more than a Division Chief in a ministry deprived of such bonuses. Total remunerations for senior staff can represent thousands of dollars¹⁹. We can probe further into this issue by examining the two most important departments in these ministries, namely the Payroll Department (*Direction de la paie*) in the Ministry of Budget and the Treasury Department (*Direction Trésor et Ordonnancement*) in the Ministry of Finance.

The Payroll Department of the Ministry of Budget is a crucial node in the expenditure circuit: this Department is tasked with the verification (*liquidation*) of payroll expenditures, and is a central locus where payroll lists are maintained, updated and processed. As such, it centralizes payroll data, and it is the institution with which all ministries liaise to effect updates with regards to the remuneration of their personnel²⁰.

According to converging information from a variety of sources, the Payroll Department is among the ones which benefits the most from the system of salary supplements. First, the department-specific salary supplement of the Payroll Department, known as the *prime d’encadrement de la bancarisation*, is of a high magnitude: in 2018, it varied between \$531 for lower-level staff (*Agent d’administration de deuxième classe*), \$688 for intermediate civil servants (*Attaché d’administration de 1ère classe*), and rose to \$1.250 for Division chiefs. These remuneration levels derived partly from the purported importance of the tasks fulfilled by Payroll Department personnel, and partly to do with the ability of Payroll Department personnel to increase their remuneration upwards, particularly if and when the minister of Budget is responsive to their demands:

The Payroll Department occupies a highly strategic position in the expenditure chain, which allows its personnel to capture the attention of the minister of Budget and other sectoral ministers. The director of the Payroll Department is as ‘powerful’ as the [director of the] DTO [Direction Trésor et Ordonnancement, the Ministry of Finance’s Treasury Department]. At the ministry of Budget, the work undertaken is rather technical and the minister necessarily depends on the Payroll Department, being unable to take any decision on remuneration without the technical point of view of the Payroll Department. This position gives this department a highly political connotation (...).The civil servants of this department are among the most privileged of the whole Republic. (..) They have managed to award themselves salary supplements that even the minister could not refuse them, due to the role they fulfil (Ministry of Public Service official, 03.07.2018)

Indeed, the Payroll Department ‘is a crucial hub of the Republic for remunerations’ (*Ibid*). Indeed, almost on a daily basis, a variety of officials come to see the director, whose audiences are managed like those of a ministerial cabinet. The director receives many high-ranking personalities, members of parliament, provincial ministers, sectoral General Secretaries, etc., who come to plead the cause of the civil servants

¹⁹ Details on this issue can be glimpsed from subsequent investigations by the *Inspection Générale des Finances* (see for example Wangi Bo-Lokonge & Photo Ngumba 2020), which provide ample documentation on the excesses (and frequent abuses) linked to staff remunerations in these two ministries.

²⁰ The issue of payroll management in the DRC has been analysed elsewhere (Moshonas 2019a; 2019b).

of their constituency, province, or sector – a practice referred to as ‘lobbying’ or ‘advocacy’, and which places this Department’s senior officials in a position of considerable power and influence.

However, in addition to the departmental salary supplement, some of its personnel can also reportedly benefit from the salary supplements of other sectors under their jurisdiction. There are six verification divisions (*Divisions Liquidation*) in the Payroll Department, each being responsible for different sectors (for example, the *Division Liquidation II* is charged with verifying the payroll of the ministries of health, environment, and tourism). Insofar as each division has oversight over certain sectors, and their signatures are required to approve new salary supplements, frequently some of the personnel of each division award themselves the salary supplements of the sectors they are tasked with overseeing (on this practice, see also the reports of the *Inspection Générale des Finances*, Wangi Bo-Lokonge & Photo Ngumba 2020). When all salary supplements cumulated are added up (including those pocketed in an unduly manner), Division Chiefs (*Chefs de Division*) reportedly could earn on a monthly basis several thousands of USD, and the Payroll Departments’ director total remuneration would be situated – ‘according to certain indiscretions’ – well above those levels (interview, Ministry of Public Service official, 03.07.2018; interview with former minister, 11.07.2018). This set-up positions Payroll Department personnel at the top of administrative pyramid in terms of remuneration²¹, second only to the staff of the Ministry of Finance’s Treasury Department – to which we now turn.

The Treasury Department of the Ministry of Finance, part of whose mandate consists in issuing of the payment orders to the central bank, whether for remunerations or ministerial functioning costs, is widely regarded as the single most important department within the DRC’s administrative landscape. While even indicative sums were not accessible for the magnitude of this departments’ salary supplements, according to informed accounts, senior civil servants of the Treasury Department (*Chefs de Division, Chefs de bureau*) would earn upwards of the equivalent of several thousand dollars (interview, Ministry of Finance junior civil servant, 26.06.2017).

The reasons behind such high emoluments are said to be linked to the highly strategic and political nature of the work undertaken at the Treasury Department. Indeed, the process of budgetary allocation and distribution in the DRC – as we already noted – is highly politicized, with some institutions consistently over-executing their budget compared to others. And, it is the Treasury Department – through its Director and the *Ordonnateur Délégué du gouvernement* – which authorizes expenditures by the Ministry of Finance. As explained by a well-positioned observer, ‘the director of the DTO [Treasury Department] and the OD [Ordonnateur Délégué], much as the director of the Payroll Department, they are ‘ministers’ in miniature by virtue of the huge importance and influence their offices afford them’ (interview, Ministry of Public Service official, 22.06.2018).

Reportedly, back in 2010, the Treasury Department was not that well-endowed in salary supplements; it is with the arrival of Augustin Matata Ponyo as finance minister in 2010, and then as prime minister from

²¹ While some other departments at the Ministry of Budget are also endowed with consequent salary supplements, partly due to equally ‘strategic’ tasks – such as the *Direction du Contrôle Budgétaire* tasked with verifying ministerial functioning expenses, or the *Direction Programmation et Suivi Budgétaire*, tasked with elaborating the credit lines in the state’s budget prior to the promulgation of the year’s financial law by parliament – not all of the other Ministry of Budget departments are in similar favourable positions. For example, the *Direction des Études et Programmation Budgétaire* of the Ministry of Budget only had a relatively small *prime d’archive* in 2017. The fact that this department is meant to be replaced by the *Direction Études et Planification* in due time has meant it has receded into a marginal position, with widespread idleness among staff (interview, Ministry of Budget junior official, 14.06.2017).

2012 onwards, that the salary supplements of that department were increased, after securing people of his trust in key positions. These high salary supplements for Treasury Department staff, then, were meant to give these agents ‘the means to carry out his policies’ (interview, junior civil servant of the Ministry of Finance, 12.09.2017), reflecting a balance of merit and loyalty (interview, former prime minister’s cabinet member, 24.09.2017). Salary supplements in the Payroll Department and at the Treasury Department therefore seem to reflect in part the strategic positioning of these offices within the expenditure chain, the (political) nature of the tasks they fulfill, as well as the personal connections which link their senior officials to their ministerial authorities.

Administrative services overseeing payroll expenditures: salary supplements in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the SECOPE

Our second case – the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education – provides an equally interesting entry point into the glaring discrepancies which can exist within a single institution, while also shedding light onto the arrangements which underlie the ‘strategic’ position of certain services compared to others. This positioning, as seen above, is often related to opportunities of capture of financial flows, in this case deriving from the oversight of payroll expenditures for teachers.

Within the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, a major fault line consists in the differences in remuneration existing between the general administration of the ministry (the *Secrétariat Général*, which regroups most departments) and the dedicated service dealing with the teachers payroll, the *Service de Contrôle de la Paie des Enseignants* (SECOPE), which has a separate salary supplement index. As can be glimpsed from table 2 above, the SECOPE salary supplement (to which all SECOPE personnel are entitled) netted a senior official with the rank of director CDF \$1.573. By contrast, in the general administration of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the only salary supplement received by staff was the *prime Lukubama*²², whose magnitude was far less important, netting a Division Chief around \$43. This situation, needless to say, has created very strong frustrations with regards to the management of remunerations in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, due to the much more favourable treatment afforded to SECOPE personnel. Indeed, even office messengers (*huissiers*) working at the SECOPE are ahead of Division Chiefs employed in the Ministry’s general administration (as captured in the frequently heard phrase, ‘*at the SECOPE, even huissiers have four-wheel drives*’)²³.

To understand these disparities, a brief look into the functions fulfilled by the SECOPE is in order. Among the responsibilities of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, a crucial one consists in being tasked with managing the payroll of teachers – which regroup a very substantial chunk of state personnel (far over a third of the 1.3 million civil servants remunerated by the state are teachers)²⁴. Since 1985, the

²² This salary supplement bears the name of a former General Secretary who instituted it; this salary supplement is not, strictly speaking, a permanent ministerial salary supplement, insofar as it is paid out of SECOPE funds (*ponctionnée sur l’enveloppe du SECOPE*), even though all Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education personnel are entitled to it (interview with Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education official, 02.09.2017).

²³ The only category of personnel in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education’s general administration receiving the prime SECOPE (thus demarcating them sharply from their subaltern staff) are Directors, which apparently has been a means to keep them aligned with the priorities of the ministry’s authorities – the ministerial cabinet and General Secretary (interview, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education official, 23.09.2017).

²⁴ The number of teachers stood at around 550.000 in October 2015, regrouping both those teaching in a classroom and those working in the educational administration (Andrianne 2016: 6).

management of the teachers' payroll has been undertaken by the SECOPE²⁵, which was created to overcome the difficulties involved in the payment of teachers' salaries in the midst of the structural adjustment years.

The SECOPE, at its inception, employed 150 staff, but over the years has ballooned to over 7.533 in 2016 (Andrienne 2016: 9), in part reflecting its development into a formidable patronage device (interview, official working in a donor-funded education project, 22.03.2016). It is worth noting that the evolution of the SECOPE, both in numbers of staff and in remunerations, has mostly unfolded under the long tenure of primary and secondary education minister Maker Mwangi (in office between 2007 and 2016) and stalwart of the presidential party *Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie* (PPRD). It is no coincidence that the SECOPE has been given special treatment.

Indeed, the massive numbers of personnel involved in the education sector, with over 500.000 teachers, afford substantial financial opportunities, particularly given the problems that characterize the teachers' payroll (in terms of ghost workers, diversion of salaries and salary supplements, Brandt 2016; Verhaghe 2007), thereby justifying the appraisal of those who consider the SECOPE as the ministry's cash cow²⁶. Leakages in the teachers' payroll, reportedly, have been used to fund the presidential party *Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et le Développement* (interview, former ruling coalition politician, 11.07.2018; Moshonas 2019a: 16). It is not surprising either, therefore, that the SECOPE has been resisting the Ministry of Public Service-led reform of introducing a fully integrated human resource and payroll management system (Moshonas 2019b: 41), which aims in the longer run to absorb the teachers payroll.

The occupational risk allowance in the health sector: the importance of civil servant mobilisations

Our third case study – salary supplements in the health sector – is instructive for a different reason: the case of the occupational risk allowance (*prime de risque professionnel*, the salary supplement initially deployed to compensate medical doctors, but thereafter extended to all health personnel) shows the extent to which senior political and administrative authorities are receptive to civil servant mobilisations from below, in this particular instance through (the threat of) strikes.

To begin with, health sector personnel expenses – which absorb the lions' share of public health spending through the domestic budget, of around three-quarters – were multiplied by six between 2007 and 2013, reflecting better coverage, as well as an improvement in the level and regularity of remunerations in the sector (World Bank 2015: 73-74). However, this fast-paced increase in personnel expenses has overwhelmingly been based on an expansion of salary supplements rather than the base salary: given health personnel are managed under the General Statute, the same statutory implications that render base salary increases difficult for civil servants also apply to health personnel. As such, the number of health workers remunerated on the wage bill and which receive the occupational risk allowance of the sector (which was instituted in 2005-2006, Ravez et al. 2019: 66) has substantially expanded, to the point where the health sector's occupational risk allowance constituted 73% of personnel expenses (*ibid*: 74). Notwithstanding its name which suggests it represents compensation for risky work, any health sector agent of the Ministry of Health is entitled to the sector's occupational risk allowance (*prime de risque*

²⁵ The SECOPE manages the teachers payroll ex-ante, and sends its updates to the Payroll Department for verification.

²⁶ As suggested by studies covering the Zairian period, management of teacher remunerations has always been a long-standing challenge, with large numbers of fictitious employees or ghost workers. Before 1979, the 'informatics' division of the Education Department (as ministries were then called) was in charge of the teachers' payroll, after which oversight was moved to the Finance Department (Gould 1980: 132-133), before being re-attached to the Education Department with the creation of the SECOPE in 1985.

professionnel) irrespectively of his place of work (Bertone & Lurton 2015: 13), and indeed in 2014-2015 it was estimated that around 80% of health sector workers received it, independently of whether they received a salary or not (Bertone, Lurton & Beya Mutombo 2016: 3).

At the same time, in addition to the problem of distribution and inequitable repartition of the wage bill in the health sector, another set of issues has to do with access: in 2013, even though 80% of the roughly 130.000 health sector personnel received the occupational risk allowance, only 30% received a base salary (even though half of them had a registration number with the Ministry of Public Service, MoPS) and 20% were devoid of any type of state-financed remuneration, and relied solely on user fees (World Bank 2015: 63). Access to remunerations, as outlined in health sector studies, is constrained in part because of insufficient budgetary latitude, but also because of the complicated processes of registration (*immatriculation*) and payroll inclusion (*mécanisation*), which tends to favour the already advantaged (such as doctors in Kinshasa, the politically connected, those able to exercise influence and make use of their network, etc.) who are able to follow through their case within the Payroll Department at the MoB (Bertone & Lurton 2015: 33; Verhage 2018; Moshonas 2019a)²⁷.

It is worth noting, though, that the formal remunerations of health sector workers, such as salaries and the sector's salary supplement, constitute only a small share of their revenues (with the exception of medical doctors, whose salary supplement is much higher than for other categories of staff). Other sources of funding encompass donor funds (per diems and performance bonuses), non-health sector activities (trade, agriculture, private sector activities), and the *prime locale* (that is, the share of user fees collected by health centres and hospitals which is split between health workers according to a repartition formula once functioning costs have been covered) (Bertone & Lurton 2015: 6-7, 36)²⁸.

The occupational risk allowance, then, constitutes only a portion of the financing of remunerations within the sector's complex political economy. Its distribution and magnitude does, however, illustrate huge discrepancies across categories of staff, reflecting diverging levels of negotiating power among those. Table 3 below provides an overview of health sector remunerations for both the base salary and the occupational risk allowance, differentiated by civil service rank and category of health sector staff: administrative personnel, health professionals, medical doctors, and dentist-surgeons / pharmacists / nurses with 5 years of university education (L2).

²⁷ The issue of registration and payroll inclusion in the Congolese civil service has been treated elsewhere (Moshonas 2019a; 2019b).

²⁸ Much as public services elsewhere in the DRC (Englebert 2014: 10), health sector structures operate by relying on 'off-budget financing', whereby government services and agencies keep the revenues they collect for their own functioning costs, while also retaining a portion of collected revenue for their personal needs. This reflects the fact that healthcare delivery has been de facto privatised and informalised from within (Bertone, Lurton & Beya Mutombo 2016: 7; Persyn & Ladrière 2004). An additional trend is that rather than public funding flowing down the system towards health zones and facilities, with the exception of government-provided remunerations, resources flow upwards: funds from facilities are channelled upwards to fund the functioning of the higher levels of the administrative pyramid (a practice known as '*la pompe*', or through the euphemism of '*financement ascendant*') (Fox et al. 2014: 99; Bertone, Lurton & Beya Mutombo 2016: 2-3; Verhage 2018).

Table 3: Official pay scale for health workers in the DRC at the end of 2018 (monthly payments in USD)

Civil service ranks corresponding to health sector personnel			Base salary	Occupational risk allowance			
				Administrative personnel	Health personnel	Medical Doctors	Dentist-surgeons, pharmacists, and L2
1	Secrétaire Général	En Chef 5-4	122	/	/	1445	847
2	Directeur Général	En Chef 3-2		70	87	1300	771
3	Directeur	En Chef 1	120	70	83	1156	688
4	Chef de Division	Inspecteur	119	64	81	1011	612
5	Chef de Bureau	Chef de Clinique/ Service	118	62	75	867	552
6	Attaché d'Administration 1ère classe	DH2	113	61	64	722	498
7	Attaché d'Administration 2ème classe	DH1	112	57	59	/	152
8	Agent d'Administration 1ère classe	DHA	110	56	55	/	/
9	Agent d'Administration 2ème classe	HOSP 1	110	55	54	/	/
10	Agent Auxiliaire 1ère classe	HOSP 2	109	55	53	/	/
11	Auxiliaire de bureau 2ème classe		103	54	/	/	/

Source: Authors' calculations, based on RDC/Ministère de la Santé (2019 : 32)

This table reveals an interesting pattern within the health sectors' remunerations system. Whilst base salaries exhibit high compression ratios and are relatively harmonized across categories of staff (in 2018, between \$103 and \$122), huge discrepancies characterize the distribution of the occupational risk allowance: in 2018, while health professionals and administrators within the health sector at the bottom of the hierarchy received salary supplements which could be as low as \$53, the magnitude of those for medical doctors was situated between \$722 and \$1.445 depending on rank. What are the factors that underpin this highly uneven distribution?

The reason behind the formidable expansion of the occupational risk allowance for doctors since 2005-2006 reflects the strong negotiating leverage that this category of personnel exercises over the health sector and government, which has historical roots going back at least to the years of the Second Republic. Indeed, under the Mobutu regime, representation of doctors through their powerful professional association (the *Ordre National des Médecins*) had provided the profession with significant influence and ability to influence distribution of resources to their advantage²⁹; with democratisation in the early 1990s,

²⁹ For example, the distribution of user fees in health structures (which yields the *prime locale*) tends to overwhelmingly favour medical doctors over other categories of personnel. This distributional practice harks back to the late 1980/early 1990s, when under the combined weight of structural adjustment, economic crisis, and cuts

doctors further organised through their trade union, the SYNAMED (*Syndicat National des Médecins*). Indeed, over the last fifteen years, under the looming threat of strikes, the occupational risk allowance for doctors has been revised upwards several times – as evidenced in numerous news reports³⁰.

Following the depreciation of the Congolese franc in 2017, for example, doctors' mobilisations radicalised and intensified, with several days of strikes in major public hospitals without ensuring a minimum service, which led to dozens of deaths (Ravez et al. 2019: 64). This led to a raise in the occupational risk allowance, to partly make up for the loss incurred by the plummeting exchange rate: in 2018, the occupational risk allowance for doctors was located between CDF \$722 and CDF \$1.445 (RDC/Ministère de la Santé Publique 2019: 32). While other categories of health sector personnel also put forward demands – which, like those of doctors, typically revolve around financial or corporatist reclamations (Ravez et al. 2019) – their collective action has proven far less successful.

According to a former cabinet official of the Ministry of Budget who was involved first-hand in negotiations with doctors over the issue of remunerations, this ability of doctors to capture the attention of the authorities has had a lot to do with the negotiating leverage exercised by the dominant doctors' trade union, SYNAMED, and its long-time charismatic leader, doctor Robert Mankoy Badjoky, under whose leadership doctors' strikes became a powerful weapon:

[Robert Mankoy Badjoky] was a doctor in a large hospital – the hospital Mama Yemo, the general hospital of Kinshasa – which receives most patients, and when this hospital is on strike, the authorities tremble. This is because there have been many deaths during quasi-wildcat strikes. This is what has made his notoriety, there have been strikes without notification, people died in the general hospital, many... And all these negotiations, this is what constitutes Mankoy's value vis-à-vis the authorities. He is an interlocutor who led the large delegation of doctors (interview, former ministry of budget cabinet member, 21.05.2016)

Because the base salary could not be raised as this implied doing the same for all other civil servants managed under the General Statute of the civil service, awards of salary supplements were provided to appease relations, which in due time became institutionalised as the occupational risk allowance in 2005-2006. These negotiations paved the rise of the SYNAMED as an interlocutor with the government. According to the same official, in some meetings he attended, speeches were 'borderline vis-à-vis the authorities, with threats of strikes in hospitals' (*ibid.*). However, when other occupational categories – such as nurses – managed to organise collectively, their strikes were far less effective than those of medical doctors, in part because their capacity to paralyse the health sector pales in comparison³¹. In short, the case of the occupational risk allowance for medical doctors demonstrates the receptiveness of

in public funding, the Congolese state disengaged from the health sector, suspending its funding to health structures, forcing hospitals and health centres to keep services running on the basis of generated revenue, which began to function in as *de facto* privatized entities (Ndaywel è Nziem 2002; interviews in Kinshasa with health sector personnel, March-April 2016).

³⁰ See for example, <https://www.radiookapi.net/2015/09/09/actualite/sante/rdc-le-gouvernement-sengage-augmenter-la-prime-de-risque-des-medecins>; <https://7sur7.cd/rdc-des-medecins-du-secteur-public-ont-marche-pour-reclamer-la-prime-de-risque/> [accessed 08.11.2024], among many others.

³¹ The fact that doctors overwhelmingly tend to exercise commanding positions within health structures such as hospitals and the ministry of health favours their effectiveness during mobilisations such as strikes.

political and administrative authorities towards certain types of bottom-up civil servant mobilisations, which are another factor structuring the evolution of the DRC's public wage system driven by, and resting on, salary supplements.

Conclusion

This paper set out to provide an analysis of the political economy of salary supplements in the Congolese civil service – an area that has been both largely under-studied in the literature on African public administrations, and in the case of the DRC, rather poorly understood. To do so, we provided a typology of different types of salary supplements in the central administration, derived from a set of 12 ministries, and further investigated the patterns (re)distribution in relation to those via three case studies, probing into the factors and drivers that surround allocation. Each of those case studies, centred on the meso-level of ministries and departments within those, allowed us to identify a series of distinct, albeit not mutually exclusive, logics at play in the public wage system, linked to their institutional positioning and linkages with political authorities: those associated with administrative services functioning as technical nodes located at the heart of the expenditure chain (ministries of Finance and Budget), administrative services overseeing payroll expenditures at the sectoral level (ministry of Primary and Secondary Education), and a logic of responsiveness to bottom-up pressures and mobilisations by civil servants (ministry of Health).

This analysis allowed us to complement, but also nuance appraisals of remunerations in African public sectors, which have insisted on their ascriptive character (Mbembe 2001; Boshab 1998), a means for states to purchase obedience and gratitude. While this insight helps situate the problem of public remunerations in some African settings – the cases of West and Sahelian Africa studied by Giorgio Blundo and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, despite obvious differences, present certain similarities with the DRC, a 'family resemblance' linked to certain traits of the colonial legacy and aid dependence (Ridde & Olivier de Sardan 2015: 5; Olivier de Sardan 2021: chapter 6) – it also invites qualification: as we have shown, the practices surrounding award of salary supplements are a two-way dynamic, driven in part by top-down responses, but also by bottom-up demands. The evolution of the public wage system since 2001 appears to have evolved via a process of ad hoc adaptation, without much strategic guidance or direction, drifting along to the tune of renewed fiscal space enabling wage bill expansion, responding to the vagaries of civil service turmoil and unrest (particularly sensitive in pre-electoral periods) by placating demands through increases in salary supplements, and rewarding loyalty when necessary – in short, political expediency.

We also situated the practices surrounding the proliferation of salary supplements within the broader trend of informalisation of public sector employment and remuneration, where given the marginality of the base salary, the pay of civil servants has become increasingly 'wageless', to use Denning's (2010) descriptor of life in the informal economy. This process of informalisation has fuelled discretion and negotiated practices, while reinforcing inequalities and exacerbating vulnerabilities, in a context where the public administration increasingly operates via a diffuse layering of informal accountabilities, often built on links between political and bureaucratic actors.

Since 2018 – the cut-off date for the data presented in this paper – the wage bill has risen further, alongside an expansion of staffing numbers³², and available evidence suggests the number of institutions awarding salary supplements to their personnel has also expanded, pushed forward in part through civil servants' mobilisations and 'lobbying' in deprived institutions, in what appears to consist in a logic of emulation of their peers in other ministries. At the same time, it is worth bearing in mind that the public wage system – built atop tremendous inequalities in remuneration – is particularly favourable to only a relatively small minority of civil servants in well-endowed ministries and senior staff³³, while also disproportionately tilted towards central-level institutions in Kinshasa. As such, rationalising the public wage system via a renewed salary policy (a necessary condition to reduce inequality, restore incentives, reduce informalisation, and ease the retirement process) is of paramount importance. Governmental authorities recognise this as a necessity – with regular periodic announcements of its imminence – although thus far without much progress. The political costs associated with such a reform – which will require overriding vested interests and substantial resistance entrenched in the most favoured institutions – partly explain why it has remained elusive to date.

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³² The minister of Finance advanced the figure of 500.000 new civil servants recruited in the period 2019-2023, expanding public employment from 1.1 million to 1.6 million; however, this figure contradicts earlier figures drawn from the Payroll Department's database over the numbers of civil servants, which counted 1.3 million payroll entries in 2017 (RDC/Ministère de la Fonction Publique 2017: 37) – highlighting the enduring difficulty to ascertain with precision staffing levels. See <https://zoom-eco.net/a-la-une/rdc-entre-2019-et-2023-la-fonction-publique-a-enregistre-pres-de-500-000-nouveaux-employes/> [accessed 08.11.2024].

³³ Precise estimates of the proportion of civil servants receiving sizeable remunerations boosted through salary supplements are not available, but given the ministries most favoured in the allocation of the wage bill are limited in number, this figure is unlikely to regroup a large number of staff.

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