

For discussion on  
21 November 2022

## Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

### An Overview of the Civil Service: Establishment, Strength, Retirement, Resignation, Age Profile and Gender Profile

#### Purpose

This paper provides an update on the overall establishment, strength, wastage situation, age profile and gender profile of the civil service.

#### Establishment and Strength

##### (a) Overall

2. Over the years, the size of the civil service has largely followed changes in economic development, community expectations and demand for public services, as well as institutional and productivity reforms. The changes in establishment (i.e. the number of posts) and strength (i.e. the number of serving civil servants)<sup>1</sup> of the civil service for the last 15 years since 2007-08 are shown at **Annex A**.

3. As shown in **Annex A**, the civil service has been growing steadily to meet the demand for new or improved public services since 2007-08. As at 31 March 2008, the civil service establishment and strength stood at around 160 000 and 153 000 respectively. As at 31 March 2022, the civil service establishment was around 193 000, and the strength was around 176 000 which represented about 2.4% of the population and about 4.6% of the labour force of Hong Kong. In the five-year period from 2017-18 to 2021-22, about 13 000 appointments were made per annum to fill vacancies arising mainly from retirement, resignation and creation of new posts in relation to new initiatives and enhanced services.

4. To strengthen fiscal discipline and ensure the sustainability of public finances, the Government has maintained zero growth in the civil service

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, civil service establishment and strength exclude judges and judicial officers, and Independent Commission Against Corruption officers, etc.

establishment for two consecutive years in 2021-22 and 2022-23. We also encourage bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to review the civil service establishment from time to time having regard to changes in workload to see if manpower savings can be achieved.

(b) Directorate and Non-directorate

5. A breakdown of the civil service establishment and strength by directorate and non-directorate levels over the last 15 years is also provided at **Annex A**. In brief, over 99% of both the civil service establishment and strength were at the non-directorate level. As at 31 March 2022, the establishment and strength at the non-directorate level were about 191 000 and 175 000 respectively, and those at the directorate level were about 1 500 and 1 400 respectively.

### **Manpower Wastage and Replenishment**

6. In 2021-22, the wastage in the civil service was about 10 500, accounting for around 5.9% of the strength. Retirement was the primary reason for departure of civil servants, while the other reasons, including resignation, completion of agreement and death, accounted for only a small proportion of wastage.

(a) Retirement

7. The existing retirement age of civil servants is prescribed under the pension legislation and Civil Service Regulations. New recruits appointed to the civil service on or after 1 June 2015 are subject to the new retirement age of 65 in respect of civilian grades and 60 in respect of disciplined services grades, regardless of their ranks. The Government launched in July 2018 the option for serving civil servants who joined the Government between 1 June 2000 and 31 May 2015 to choose to retire at the age of 65 (for civilian grades) or 60 (for disciplined services grades, regardless of ranks). Among some 56 000 eligible civil servants, a total of about 47 000 eligible civil servants had taken the option.

8. The retirement<sup>2</sup> position of the civil service over the last 15 years is shown at **Annex B**. The number of retirees was around 6 100 in 2021-22 which represented about 3.5% of the strength. As regards directorate civil

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this paper, “retirement” covers normal retirement, early retirement and re-employment after retirement without a break in service.

servants, the number of retirees ranged between 6.2% and 11.7% of the directorate strength. The number stood at around 9.7% in 2021-22. Details are at **Annex C**.

9. Based on the existing retirement age of civil servants, it is projected that the natural wastage rate will gradually decline. The number of retirees was at the annual average of about 3.7% of the civil service strength for the five-year period ending 2021-22. The number will then gradually decline to about 3% in the five-year period ending 2026-27, to about 2.7% in the five-year period ending 2031-32, to about 1.9% in the five-year period ending 2036-37, and to about 1.5% in the five-year period ending 2041-42.

(b) Resignation

10. Although the departures of civil servants due to resignation have risen moderately in recent years, they have not affected the operation of the Government much. As shown at **Annex D**, the resignation rate ranged from 0.8% to 2.1% of the strength of the civil service in the five-year period from 2017-18 to 2021-22. The reasons for civil servants' resignation include medical or family reasons, pursuing further studies and taking up other jobs.

(c) Filling of Vacancies

11. The Government has been striving to attract and encourage people from different backgrounds to join the civil service through various channels to fill vacancies arising from reasons such as retirement and resignation with a view to ensuring sufficient manpower resources to serve the public and sustaining the healthy manpower flow and turnover of the civil service. For example, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) collaborates with the tertiary institutions in organising career talks to promote the recruitment of the Administrative Officer and the Executive Officer grades; the Hong Kong Police Force holds the Police Recruitment Experience and Assessment Day to showcase to participants the work of different police units and the recruitment selection process; various government departments also set up booths in the Education & Careers Expo organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council to attract students and young job seekers to join their grades. Moreover, the Youth Portal (Youth.gov.hk) features videos of civil servants introducing the job nature of different grades and sharing their experiences in order to enhance applicants' knowledge and confidence in applying for civil service jobs. Different activities held by various departments also help young students to have a better understanding of the different areas of work in the Government.

12. In addition, the CSB coordinates the youth internship programmes of B/Ds on a yearly basis to provide a variety of internship opportunities in government departments and public bodies. These internship programmes allow young people to unleash their potential, help cultivating their interest in public service and enthusiasm for serving the community, while nurturing new blood who are committed to participating in Hong Kong's development. In fact, some students who had participated in the internship programmes have chosen to join the Government after graduation. We plan to offer over 3 000 internship places in more than 80 B/Ds and public bodies in 2023-24 as a continuous effort to provide diversified job opportunities for young people with different career aspirations and who are interested in pursuing a career to serve the community, as well as to ensure the healthy manpower flow of the civil service.

13. Government recruitment exercises have always been conducted in an open and fair manner. Civil service vacancies are filled by selection from eligible candidates through a competitive process on the basis of merits. The Government will assess the suitability of candidates by examining whether they have the requisite abilities, skills, qualifications and experience; and will ascertain whether the orientation and aptitude of the candidates meet the requirements of the vacancies concerned. Candidates also need to undergo medical examination and integrity checking to ensure that they are suitable for appointment. With regard to promotion of civil servants, the most suitable and most meritorious officers are selected and promoted through a fair process and based on objective criteria, including the performance, character, ability, experience of the officers concerned and the qualifications prescribed for the promotion ranks (if any). The Government has put in place a well-established mechanism to ensure the impartiality and integrity of the promotion exercises.

14. Based on current projection, the natural wastage rate of civil servants will gradually decline. Nonetheless, the Government will plan for the future in light of the factors such as changes in demographic structure and participation rate of labour force. B/Ds will make appropriate preparations by planning and conducting recruitment exercises in advance of anticipated retirements. However, in order to safeguard the open and fair appointment system, it would be difficult for B/Ds to fill the vacancies within a short period if any unexpected vacancies (i.e. non-retirement cases) arise. As such, relevant B/Ds may flexibly deploy other measures, including those for extending the service of civil servants, to retain experienced civil servants who have reached their retirement age so as to meet specific manpower needs.

(d) Succession and Training

15. The Government has been maintaining a clear and well-structured career development system for civil servants to attract, nurture and retain talents. The Secretary for the Civil Service meets with heads of departments to discuss and examine the directorate succession arrangements and planning in respective departments on a regular basis, with a view to identifying potential succession issues and taking appropriate measures in a timely manner. We will identify as early as possible officers with potential and outstanding performance (but may have shorter years of service), provide them with enhanced training and advancement opportunities, and prepare these promising officers for effective performance and for taking up higher responsibilities by career management. Heads of departments/grades will monitor their posting needs and keep in view their development, formulate departmental development plans, and provide opportunities for promising senior professionals to take up responsibilities beyond their professional domains in a strategic manner to widen their exposure (e.g. provide opportunity for departmental officers to participate in policy formulation under the Secretariat Attachment Programme).

16. In tandem with the succession planning efforts, the Government also provides structured training and development programmes for civil servants so as to enrich their exposure, enable them to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for the discharge of their duties, and prepare them for taking up higher responsibilities. Departments will also systematically arrange promising officers to attend advanced leadership programmes to help them develop the essential leadership and administrative competencies required to fulfill the role of a directorate officer. For example, the Master's Degree in Public Policy Programme for senior civil servants held jointly with the School of Government of Peking University is specifically designed for senior civil servants of high potential. We will encourage departments to select young officers with good potential and commitment to participate in this programme.

### **Age Profile**

17. The age profile of the civil service over the last 15 years is illustrated at **Annex E**. The majority of the civil servants were aged 40 or above, but the share has been decreasing since 2007-08. In 2021-22, the age groups of 40-49 and 50 or above constituted about 25.8% and 28.6% of the civil service strength respectively, while the total number of civil servants in the age groups of 20-29 and 30-39 accounted for about 45.6% of the civil service strength.

Overall, the average age of the civil service is lower than the average age of the labour force of Hong Kong. As shown at **Annex F**, the majority of Hong Kong's labour force were aged 50 or above (about 35%) whereas the majority of the civil servants were in the age group of 30-39 (about 31%). The age profile of the other age groups of the civil service is in line with that of the labour force of Hong Kong.

18. **Annex G** shows the age profile of directorate civil servants over the last 15 years. In terms of percentage, the directorate strength in the age group of 40-49 has been on a continuous decline since 2007-08 and has remained stable after having a moderate increase in 2018-19. The age group of 50 or above remained the largest group, representing about 77.4% of its strength in 2021-22.

19. As shown at **Annex H**, new recruits to the civil service were mainly young people. In the five-year period from 2017-18 to 2021-22, there were around 31 500 new recruits in the age group of 20-29 (or about 60% of the total intake) and around 13 200 new recruits in the age group of 30-39 (or about 25% of the total intake). Although the number of new recruits in the age group of 20-29 has declined in recent years, it still accounts for the highest proportion of the total intake, with only a slight drop in terms of percentage. In fact, the overall appointment of civil servants varies from year to year and the number of applications received per annum may be affected by various factors including labour market situation and preference of applicants. As shown at **Annex E**, the number of civil servants in the age group of 20-29 has been increasing from about 7.4% of the civil service strength in 2007-08 to about 15.7% in 2019-20, with a slight decrease since 2020-21 to about 14.3% in 2021-22.

## **Gender Profile**

20. The female participation rate in the civil service over the last 15 years is illustrated at **Annex I**. The overall proportion of female civil servants increased from around 34% in 2007-08 to around 38.9% in 2021-22. The rising trend of female participation is observed in both directorate and non-directorate ranks during the period, the proportion for which increased from around 30% in 2007-08 to around 41% in 2021-22 and from around 34% in 2007-08 to around 38.8% in 2021-22 respectively.

21. Furthermore, the rising trend of female participation rate is more prominent in respect of civilian grades. Specifically, the participation rate of

female civilian civil servants<sup>3</sup> rose from around 44.3% in 2007-08 to around 49.1% in 2021-22, under which the proportion increased from around 32.6% in 2007-08 to around 42.9% in 2021-22 for directorate officers, and from around 44.4% in 2007-08 to around 49.2% in 2021-22 for non-directorate officers. Details are at **Annex J**. The rise in the proportion of female civil servants was in line with the overall increasing trend in the female participation rate in the labour force of Hong Kong, which was increased from around 46.6% in 2008 to around 50.3% in 2021. The participation rate of female civilian officers was also on par with that in the labour force of Hong Kong. As at 31 March 2021 and 31 March 2022, of the 18 Permanent Secretary posts ranked at Point 8 of the Directorate Pay Scale (i.e. the top civil service positions), 14 (or 77.8%) and 13 (or 72.2%) were filled respectively by female officers.

### **Advice Sought**

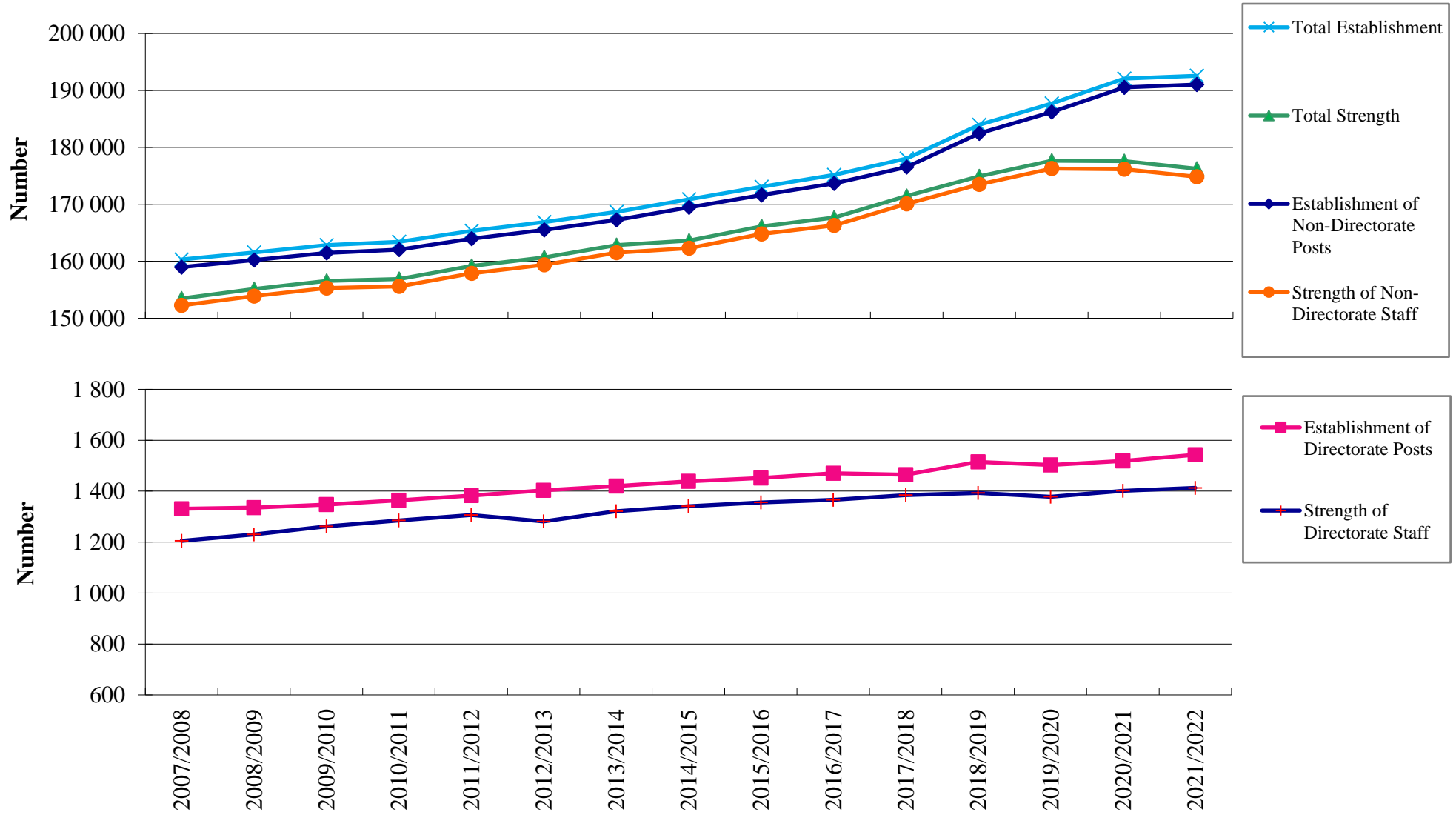
22. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

**Civil Service Bureau**  
**November 2022**

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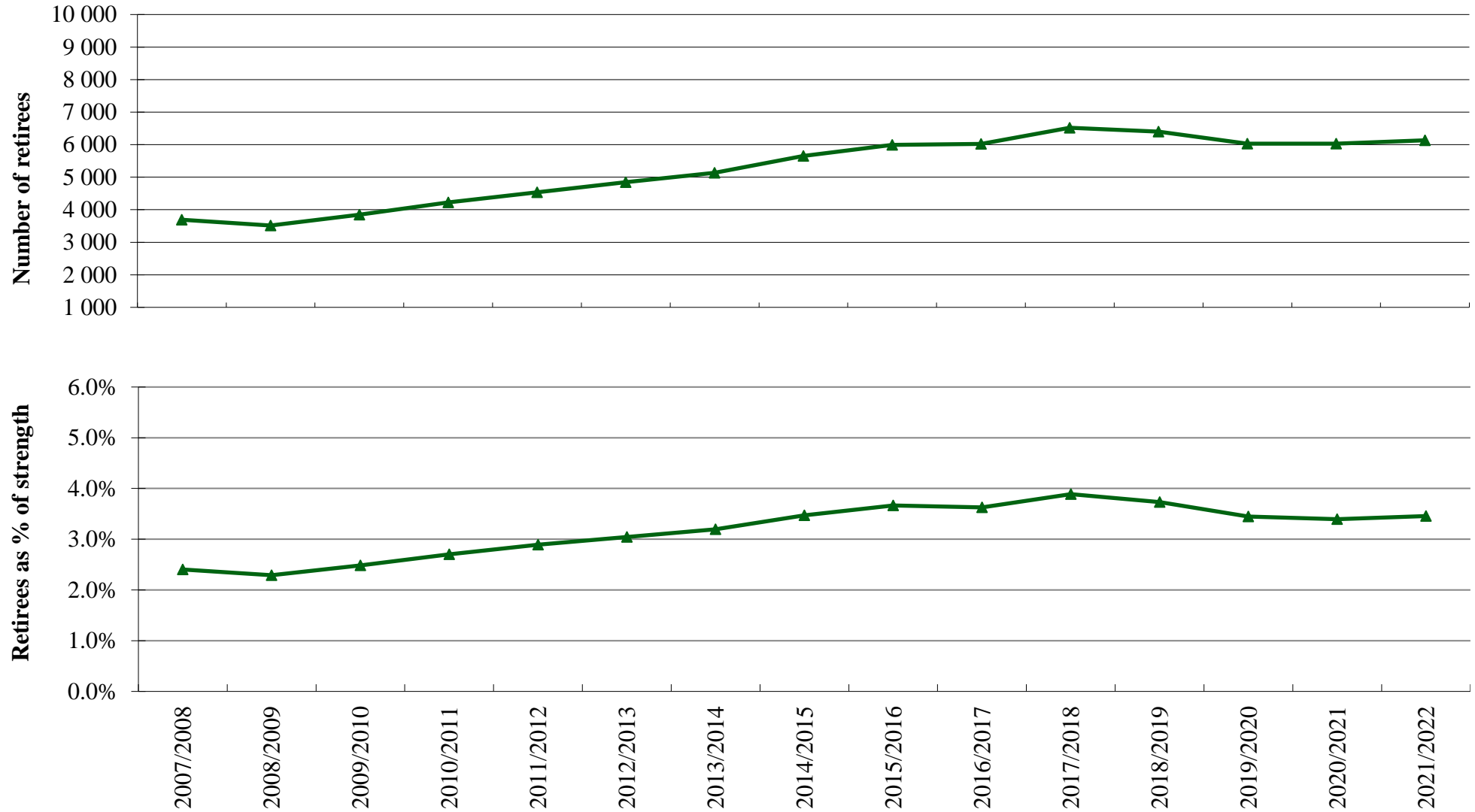
<sup>3</sup> Calculated by excluding all civil servants who are serving in the disciplined services and remunerated by the Police Pay Scale and Disciplined Services Pay Scales.

Establishment and Strength of the Civil Service from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022

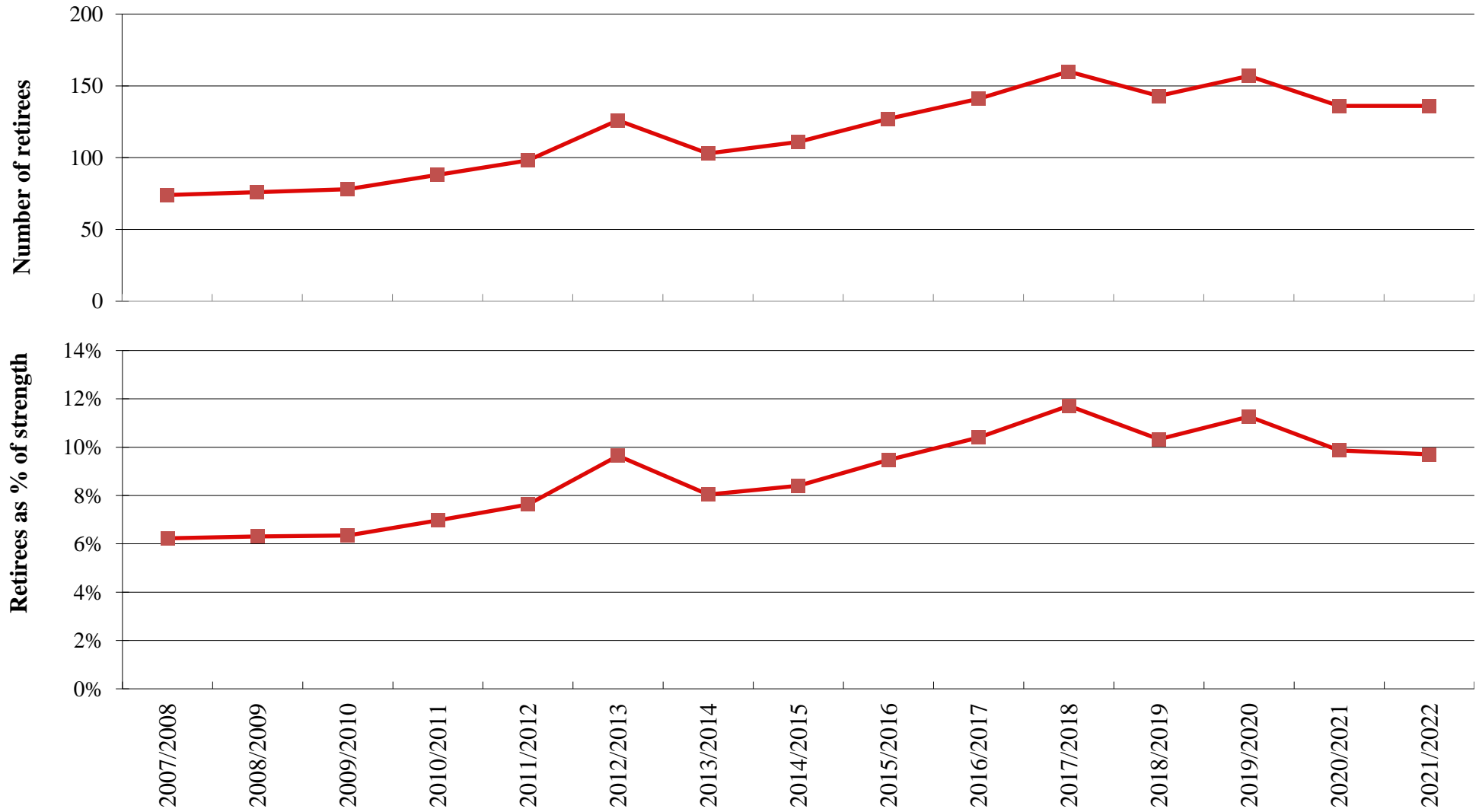




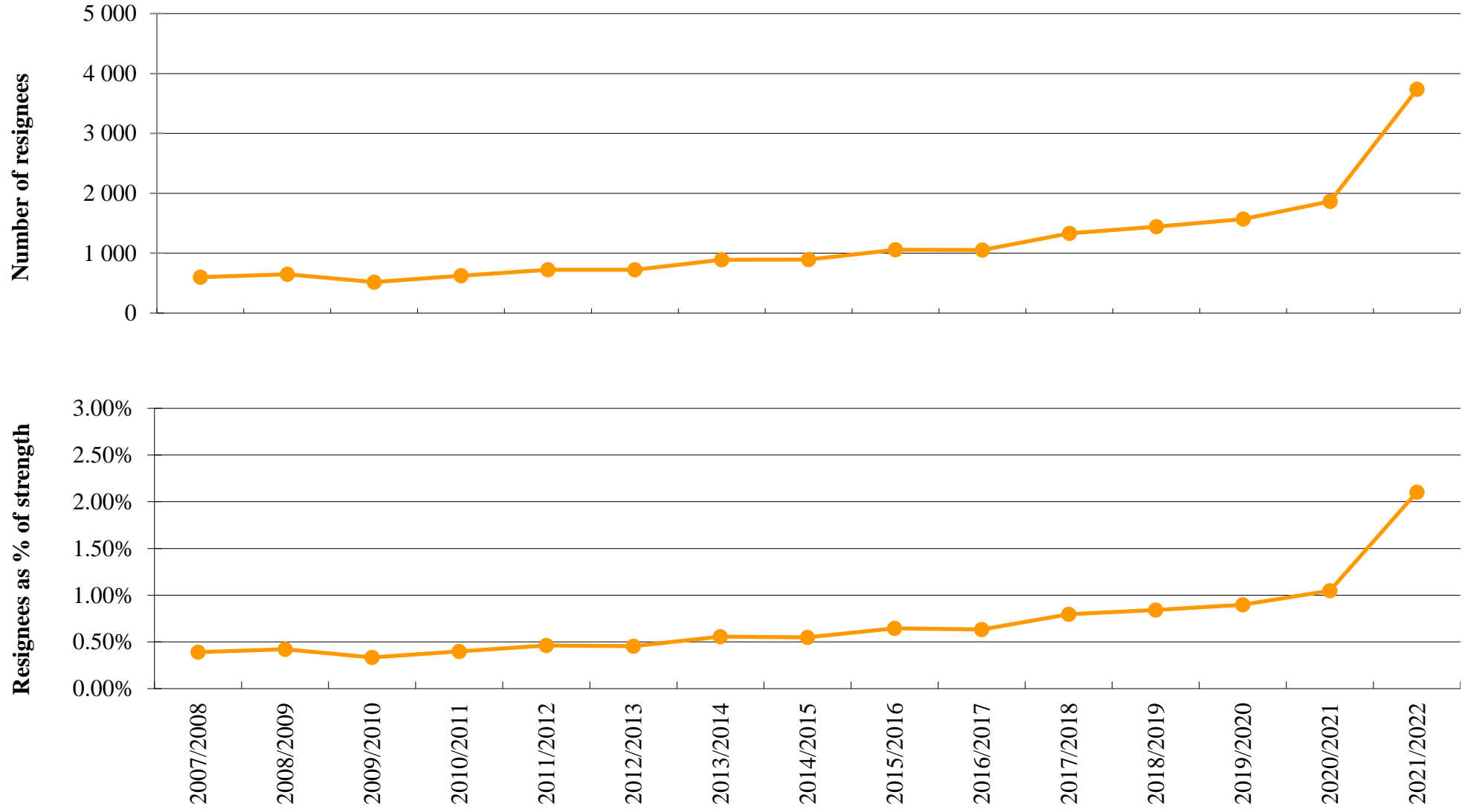
### Retirement Position of the Civil Service from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022



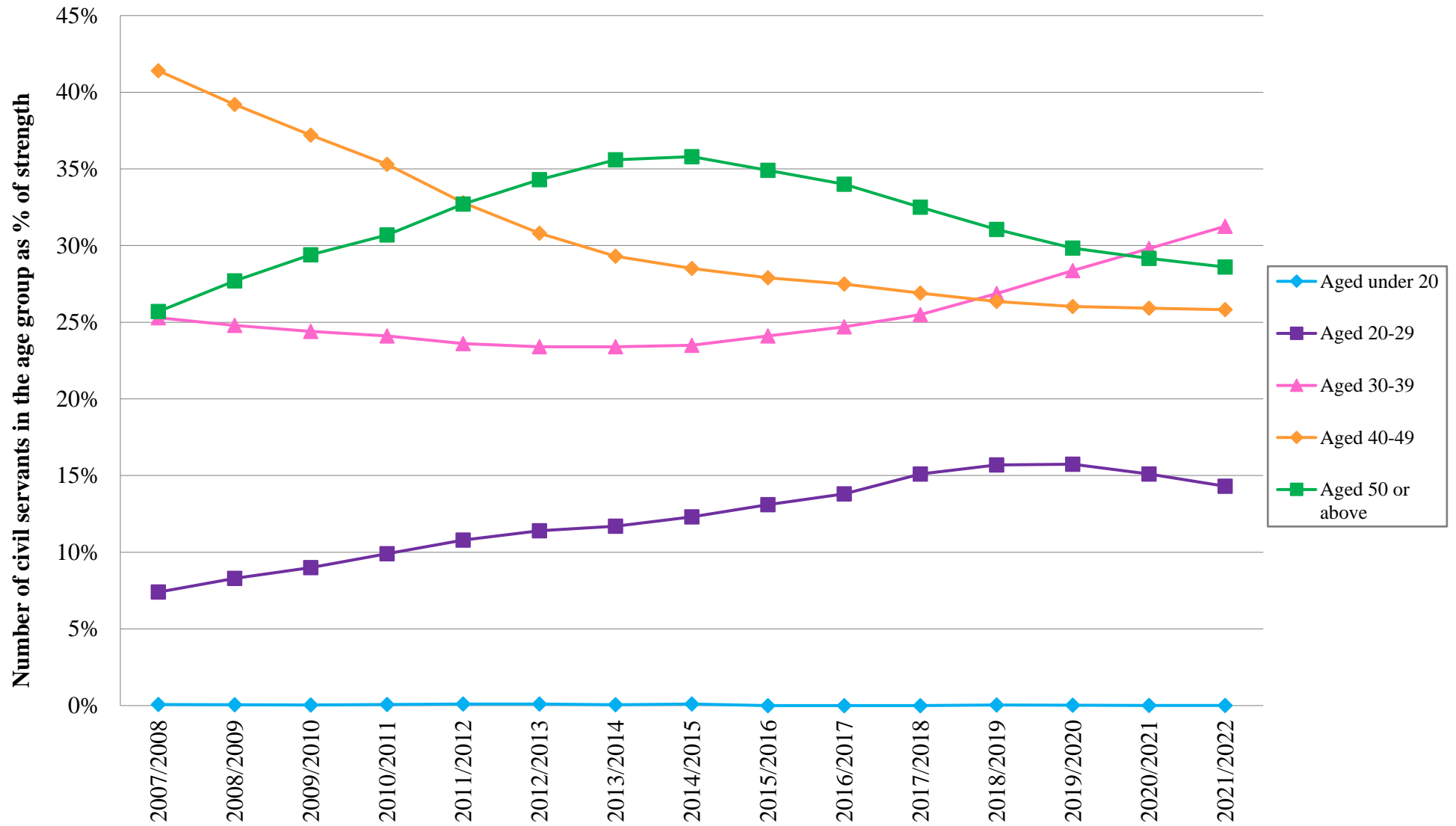
### Retirement Position of Directorate Civil Servants from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022



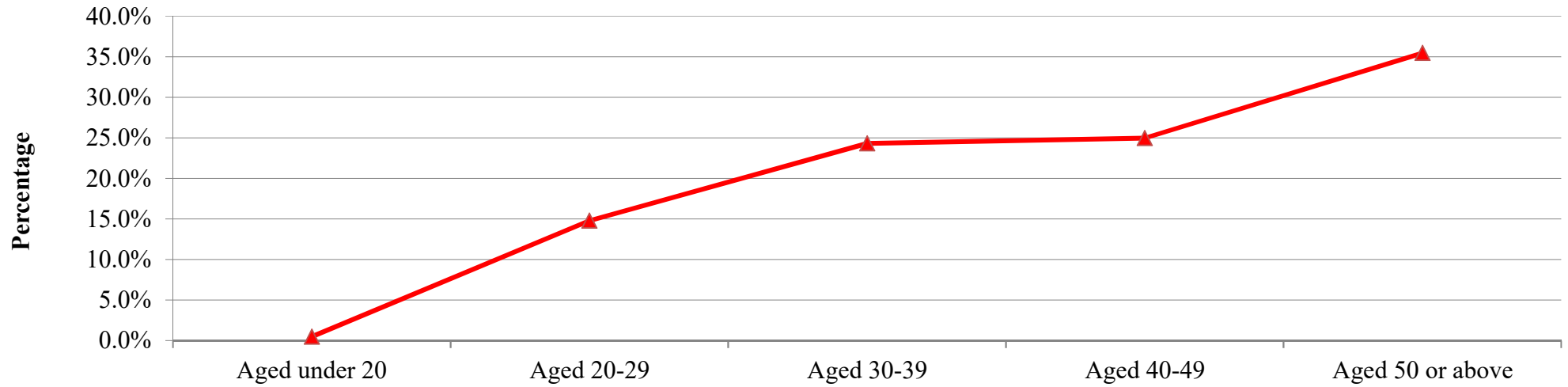
### Resignation Position of the Civil Service from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022



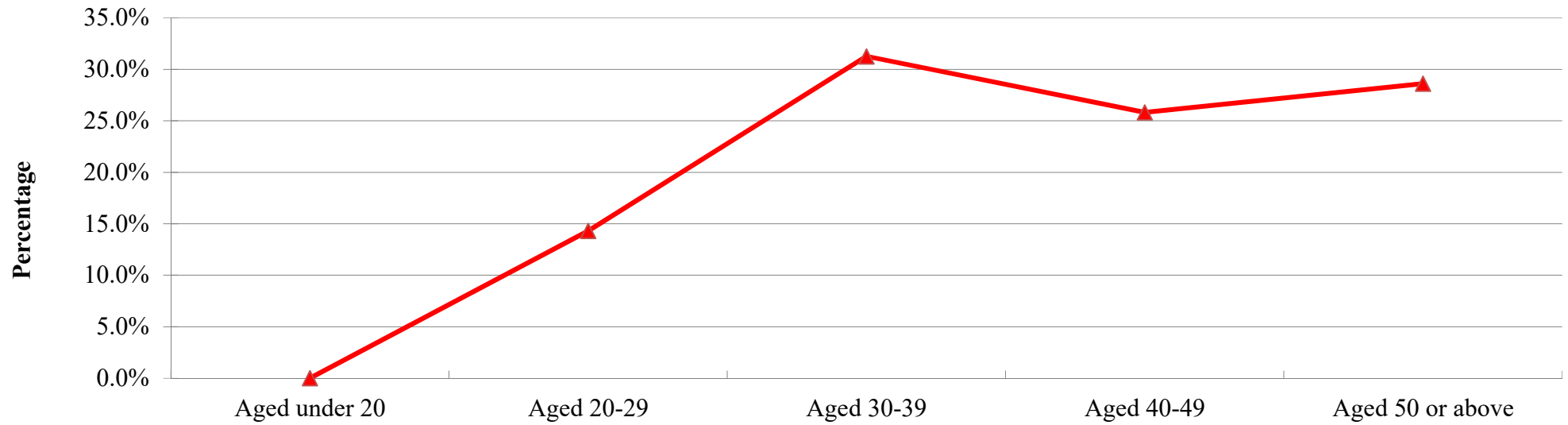
Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022



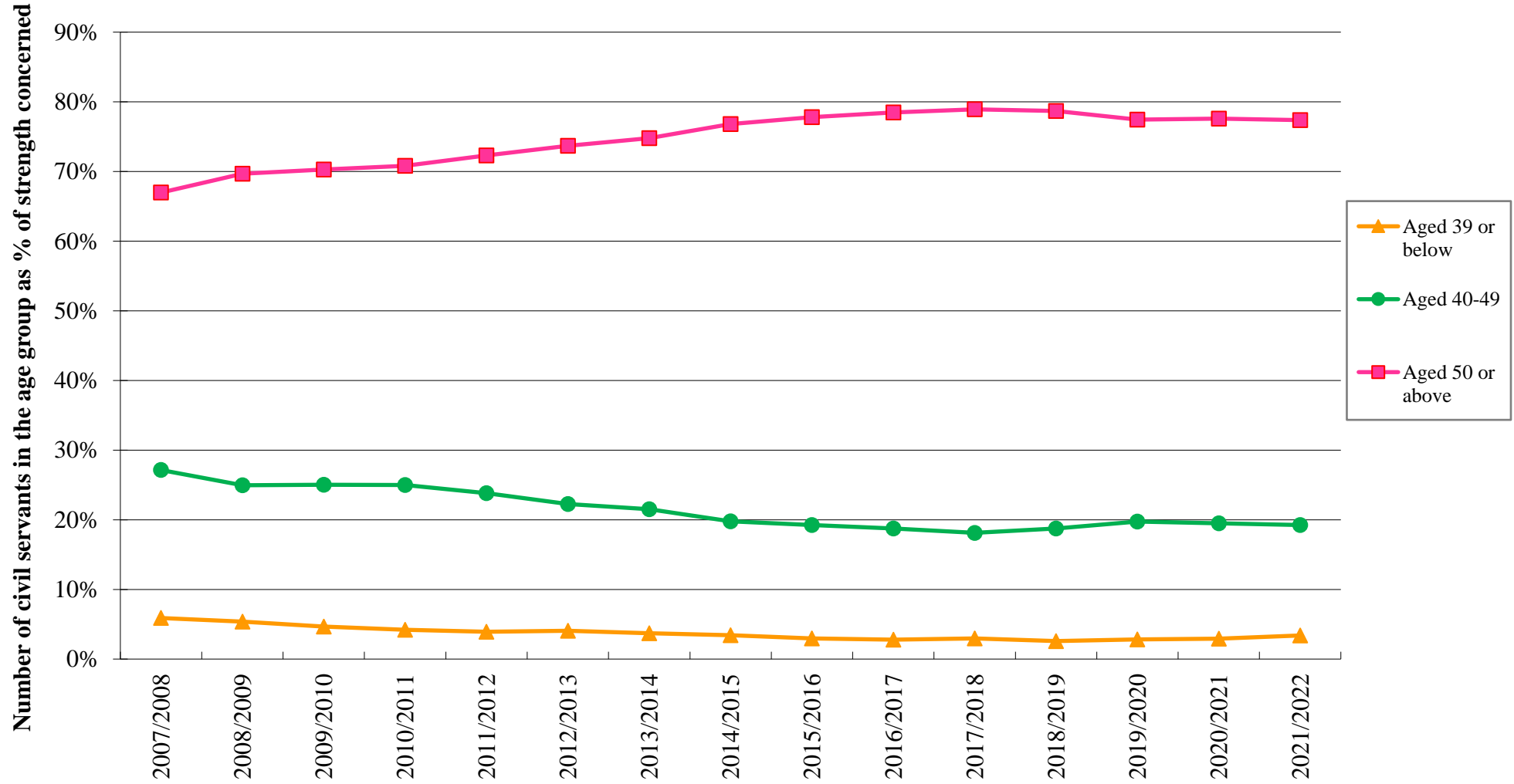
**Age Profile of the Hong Kong Labour Force 2022**



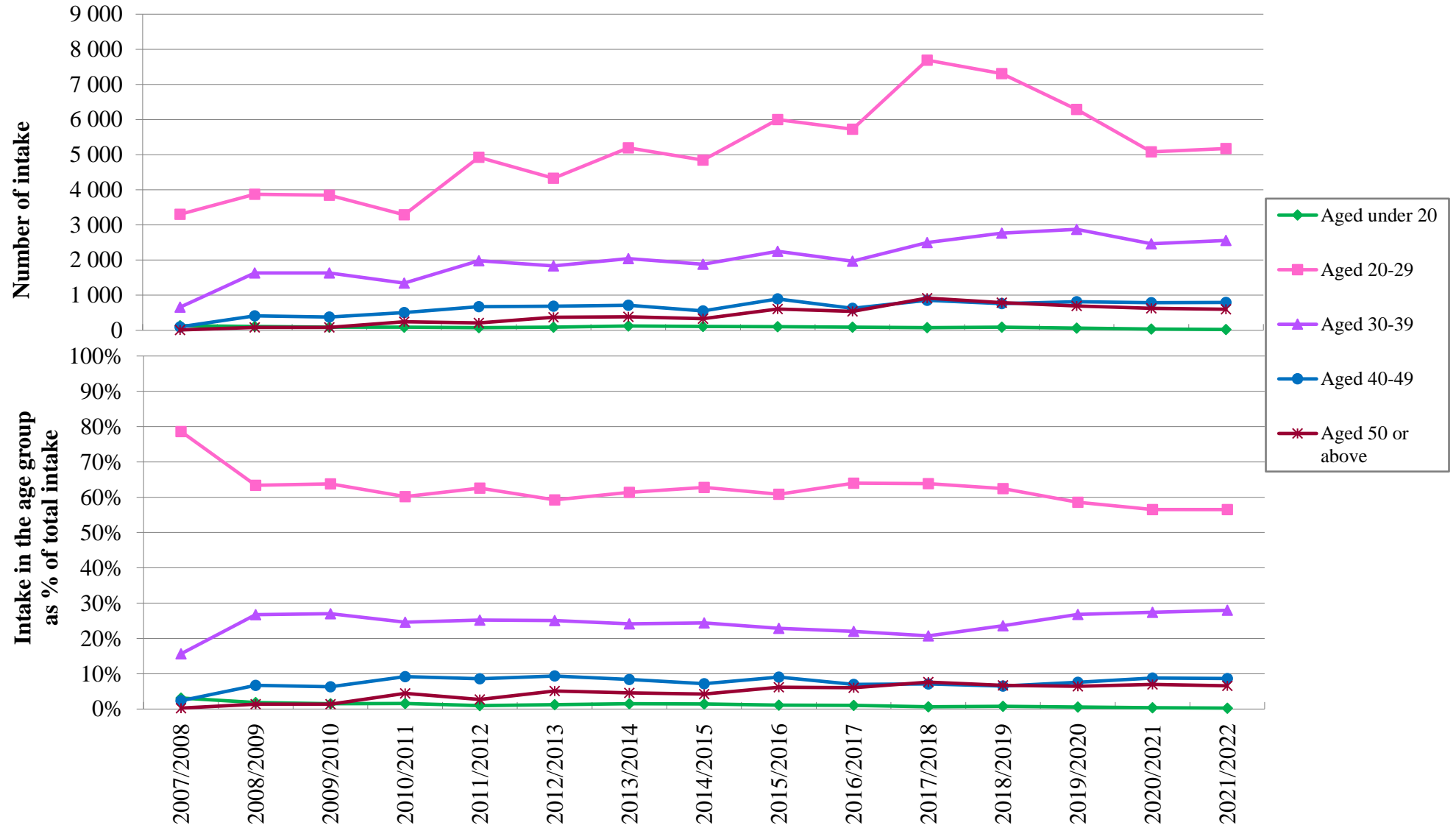
**Age Profile of the Civil Service 2022**



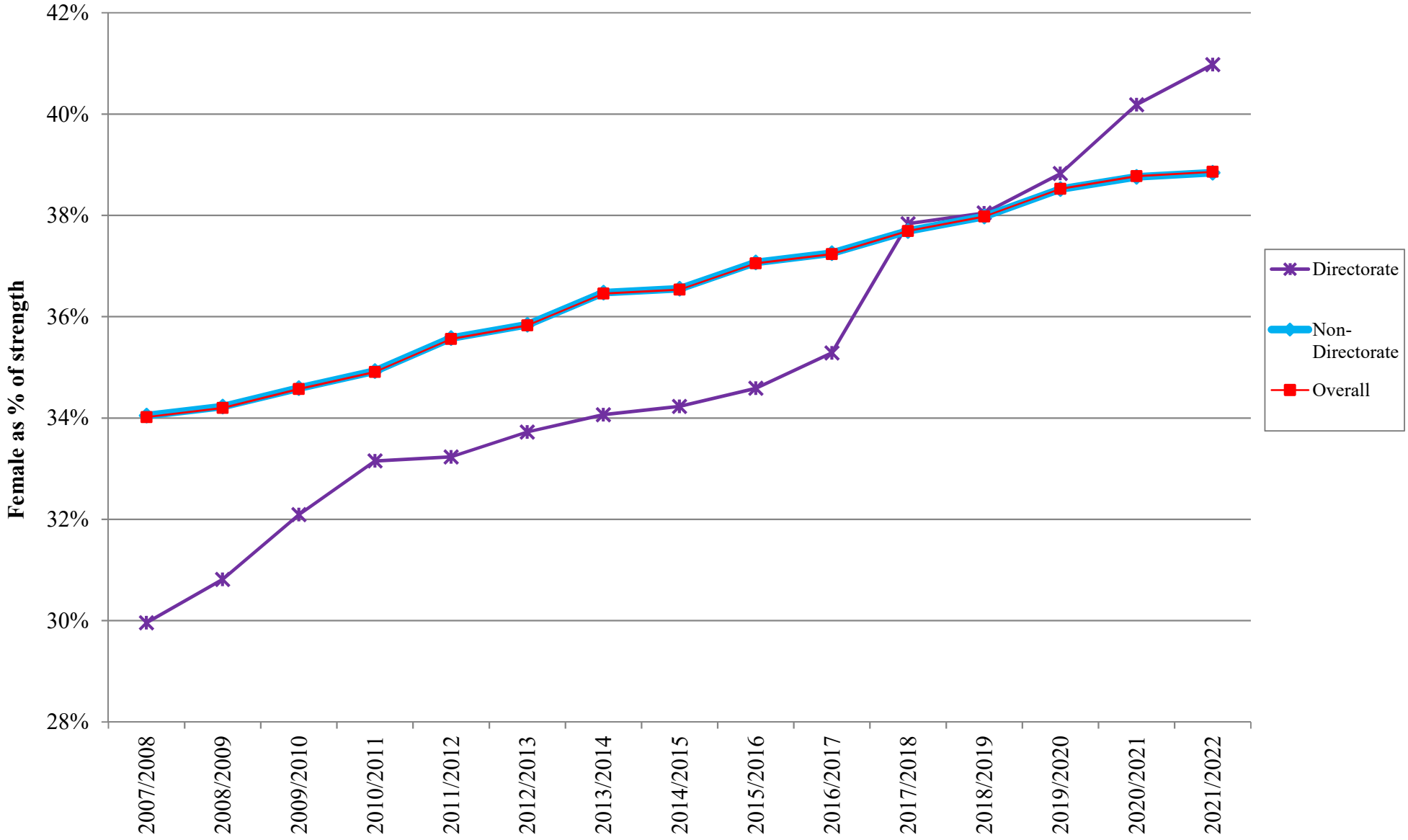
### Directorate Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022



Intake of Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022



Percentage of Female (by Rank) in the Civil Service from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022





**Percentage of Female (by Rank) in the Civil Service  
(excluding Officers on Police Pay Scale and Disciplined Services Pay Scales)  
from 2007-2008 to 2021-2022**

