

For discussion on  
20 November 2023

## **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 2008-09 are shown at **Annex A**.

3. The civil service has been growing steadily to meet the demand for new or improved public services since 2008-09. As at 31 March 2009, the civil service establishment and strength stood at around 162 000 and 155 000 respectively. As at 31 March 2023, the civil service establishment was around 192 000, and the strength was around 174 000 which represented about 2.3% of the population and about 4.6% of the labour force of Hong Kong. In the five-year period from 2018-19 to 2022-23, about 12 200 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 since 2021-22. We will continue to strictly control the growth of the civil service establishment and maintain the target of zero growth in 2023-24. We encourage bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to enhance effectiveness and efficiency through re-prioritisation, internal redeployment and streamlining of work processes, so that various new policies and initiatives of the Government can be taken forward with the civil service establishment maintaining at the present level.

(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**. As at 31 March 2023, the establishment and strength at the non-directorate level were about 191 000 and 172 000 respectively, and those at the directorate level were about 1 550 and 1 400 respectively. In brief, over 99% of both the civil service establishment and strength were at the non-directorate level.

### **Manpower Wastage and Replenishment**

6. In 2022-23, the wastage in the civil service was about 10 100, accounting for around 5.7% 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). About 47 000 out of some 56 000 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 5 800 in 2022-23,

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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.

representing about 3.3% of the strength. As regards directorate civil servants, the number of retirees ranged between 6.3% and 11.7% of the directorate strength. The number stood at around 10.8% in 2022-23. 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 3.6% of the civil service strength for the five-year period ending 2022-23. The number will then gradually decline to about 2.9% in the five-year period ending 2027-28, to about 2.7% in the five-year period ending 2032-33, and will further drop to about 1.7% in the two five-year periods ending 2037-38 and 2042-43.

(b) Resignation

10. Impacted by the decrease in total labour force of Hong Kong, the resignation rate of the civil service was 2.2% in 2022-23, which is similar to 2021-22. Nonetheless, the resignation rate has slackened. The proportion of civil servants who resigned from the service in the five-year period from 2018-19 to 2022-23 are shown at **Annex D**. Although the departures of civil servants have risen in recent years, they have not affected the operation of the Government much because government departments have put in place mechanisms for handling the duties of vacant posts, such as appointing suitable officers to take up acting appointments and extending the service of civil servants beyond the retirement age. We will continue to keep in view the overall manpower requirement and recruitment situation. We will also remind recruiting B/Ds to take early actions to formulate manpower plans and launch recruitment exercises to fill vacancies arising from reasons such as retirement and resignation in a timely manner.

(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 the succession of quality staff at different levels.

12. In order to attract people with aspirations to serve the community to join the civil service and to enable young people to better plan their future career development, since June 2023, departments/grades may, having regard to their manpower resources and operational needs, consider whether to expand the pool of eligible candidates to undergraduate or postgraduate

students in their penultimate year of study (e.g. in a four-year undergraduate curriculum, they refer to students in the third year of study). The new initiative has received enthusiastic response. The number of university students applying for the Common Recruitment Examination and the Basic Law and National Security Law Test has increased by more than double from 2 500 in the last round (June 2023) to 5 300 in October 2023. Among them, nearly 30% are undergraduate students in the third year of study.

13. We have strengthened the promotion of the above new arrangement and the diversified job opportunities in the Government in the new academic year. In addition to taking part in career fairs and organising recruitment talks by various departments/grades at more than 10 local universities, we also held the first large-scale Government Career Fair (i.e. career fair involving government departments only) at the University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Baptist University in September this year for students to learn about the work of over 20 departments and more than 40 civil service grades (including general grades, professional grades and disciplined services) in total. More than 1 000 students participated in the career fair. The Government will continue to step up recruitment and promotion efforts for various grades, including organising career fairs and recruitment talks at more local universities and actively participating in the Education & Careers Expo, so as to strengthen promotion of the diversified civil service jobs.

14. As more and more local students choose to pursue further studies in the Mainland and with the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, various departments have been strengthening promotion and recruitment efforts for Hong Kong students studying in the Mainland in recent months. For example, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) organised roving recruitment talks in Shanghai and Beijing for the first time this year, which attracted participation of more than 2 000 Hong Kong people in total. Our Economic and Trade Offices have also been proactively reaching out in their respective jurisdiction to carry out promotion on the recruitment of various grades.

15. 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. In 2023-24, we plan to offer

over 3 300 internship places in more than 80 B/Ds and public bodies 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.

16. 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. B/Ds will safeguard the open and fair appointment system in filling those unexpected vacancies (i.e. non-retirement cases) when they arise. Furthermore, 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) Retention of Talent

17. The Government has been maintaining a clear and well-structured career development system for civil servants to attract, nurture and retain talent. Particular emphasis has also been given in identifying as early as possible officers with potential and outstanding performance (but may have shorter years of service), and providing them with enhanced training and advancement opportunities. 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. arrange appropriate postings, professional and management trainings, Mainland and overseas visits, and secretariat attachments).

18. Moreover, 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

19. The age profile of the civil service over the last 15 years is illustrated at **Annex E**. The proportion of the civil servants aged 39 or below has increased from 33.2% in 2008-09 to 45.4% in 2022-23. Specifically, the age groups of 29 or below and 30-39 constituted about 12.8% and 32.6% of the civil service strength respectively. 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 36.4%) whereas the majority of the civil servants were in the age group of 30-39 (about 32.6%). The age profile of the other age groups of the civil service is in line with that of the labour force of Hong Kong.

20. **Annex G** shows the age profile of directorate civil servants over the last 15 years. The age group of 50 or above remained the largest group, representing about 77.4% of its strength in 2022-23. In terms of percentage, the directorate strength in the age group of 39 or below has remained stable in the recent years.

21. As shown at **Annex H**, new recruits to the civil service were mainly young people. In the five-year period from 2018-19 to 2022-23, there were around 27 800 new recruits in the age group of 29 or below (or about 57.9% of the total intake) and around 12 800 new recruits in the age group of 30-39 (or about 26.7% of the total intake). Although the number of new recruits in the age group of 29 or below 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.

## Gender Profile

22. 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 34.2% in 2008-09 to around 38.7% in 2022-23. 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 30.8% in 2008-09 to around 40.6% in 2022-23 and from around 34.2% in 2008-09 to around 38.7% in 2022-23 respectively.

23. 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 44.5% in 2008-09 to around 49% in 2022-23, under which the proportion increased from around 33.4% in 2008-09 to around 42.7% in 2022-23 for directorate officers, and from around 44.6% in 2008-09 to around 49.1% in 2022-23 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 46.9% in 2009 to around 50.1% in 2022. The participation rate of female civilian officers was also on par with that in the labour force of Hong Kong. As at 31 March 2022 and 31 March 2023, of the 18 Permanent Secretary posts ranked at Point 8 of the Directorate Pay Scale (i.e. the top civil service positions), 13 (or 72.2%) and 12 (or 66.7%) were filled respectively by female officers.

### **Advice Sought**

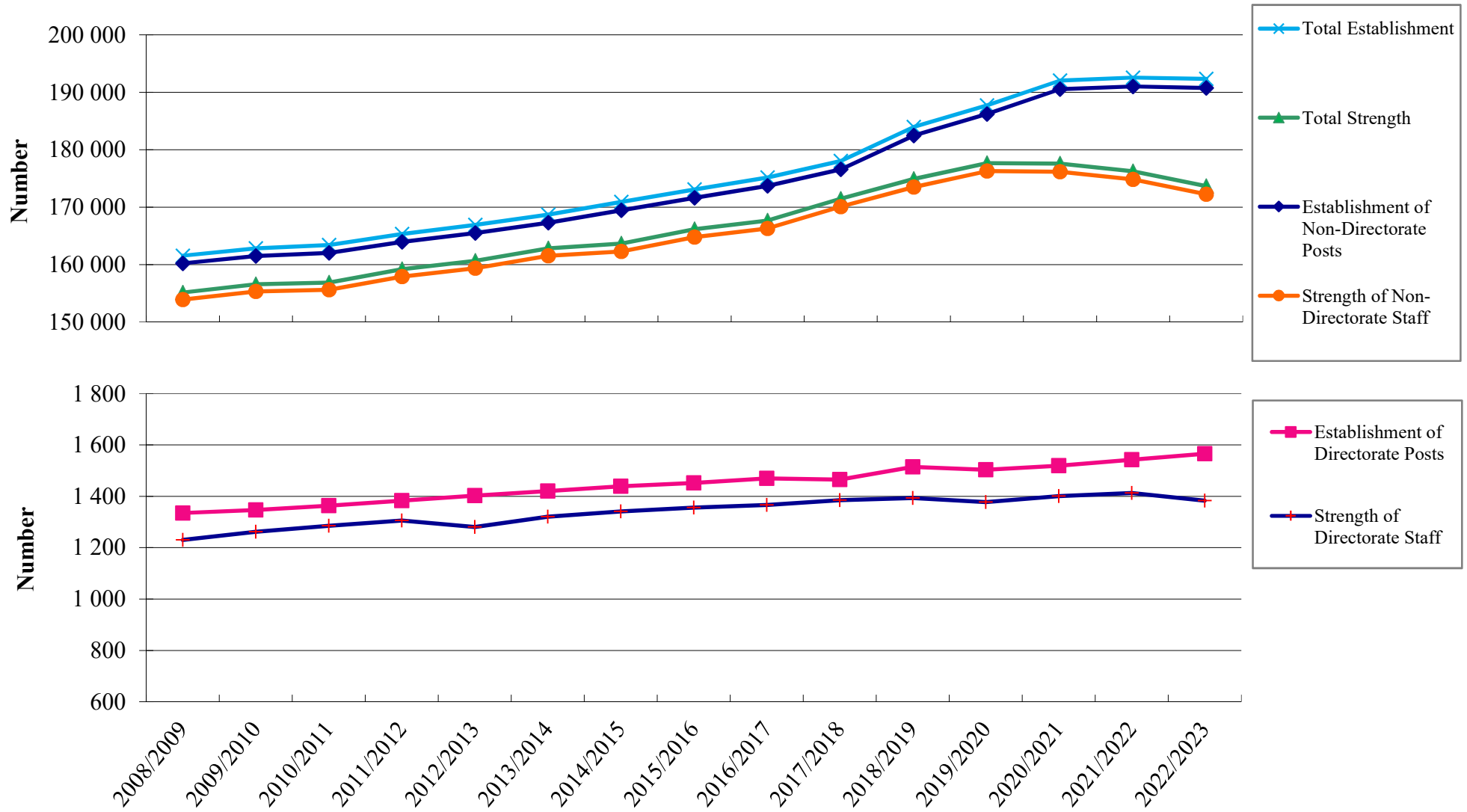
24. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

**Civil Service Bureau**  
**November 2023**

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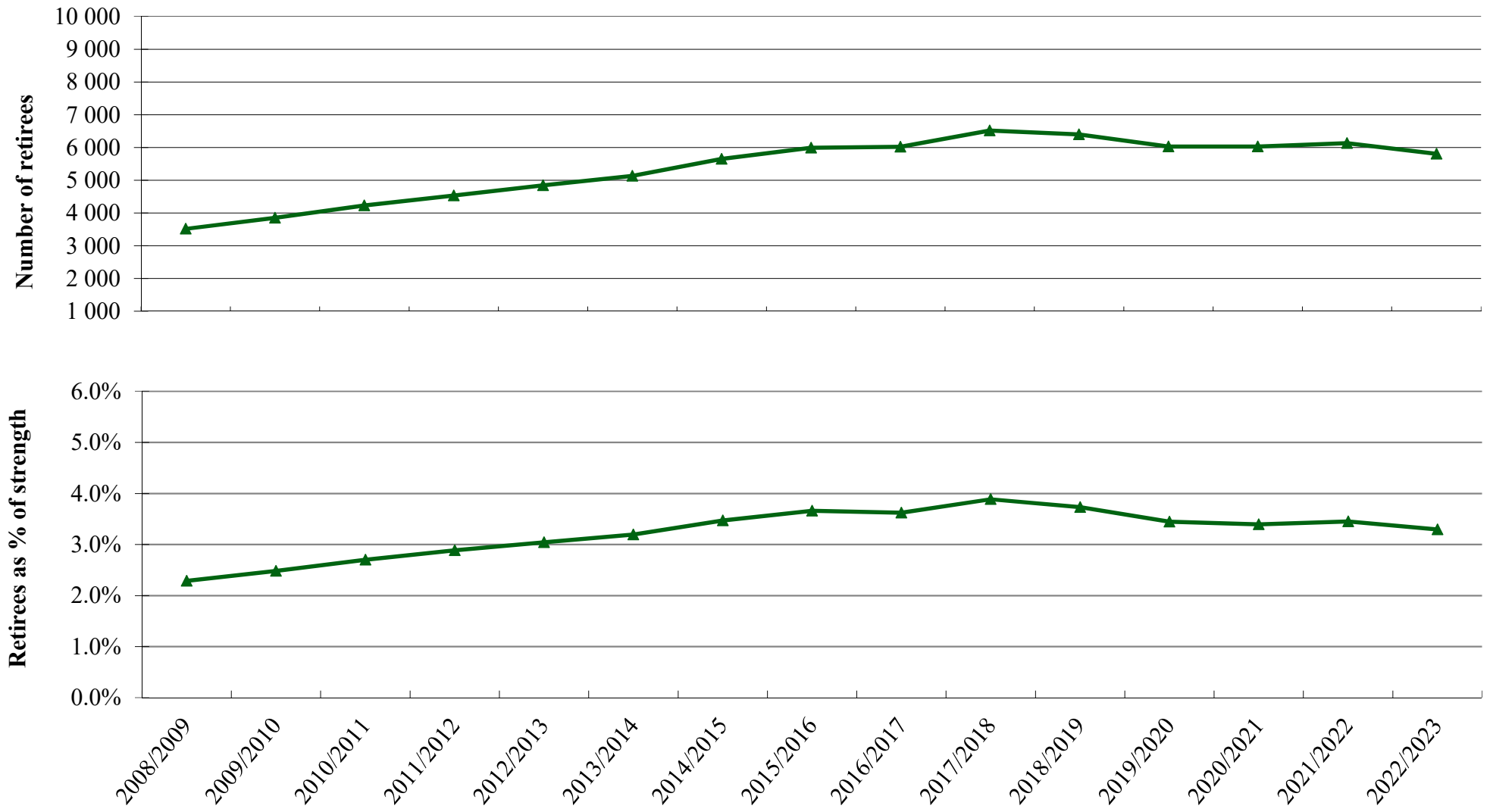
<sup>3</sup> Calculated by excluding all civil servants who are serving in the disciplined services and remunerated by the Police Pay Scale and Disciplined Services Pay Scales.

Establishment and Strength of the Civil Service from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023

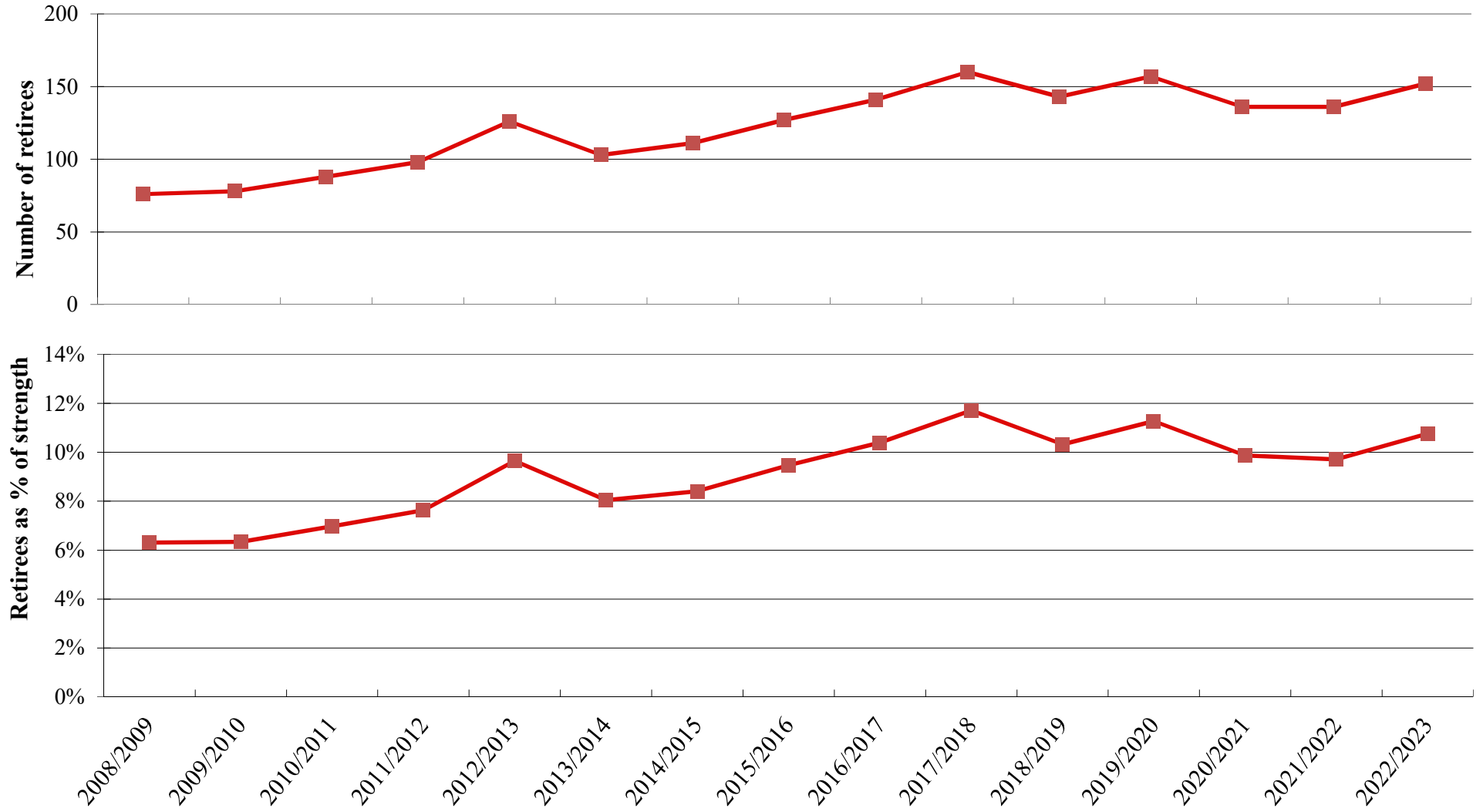




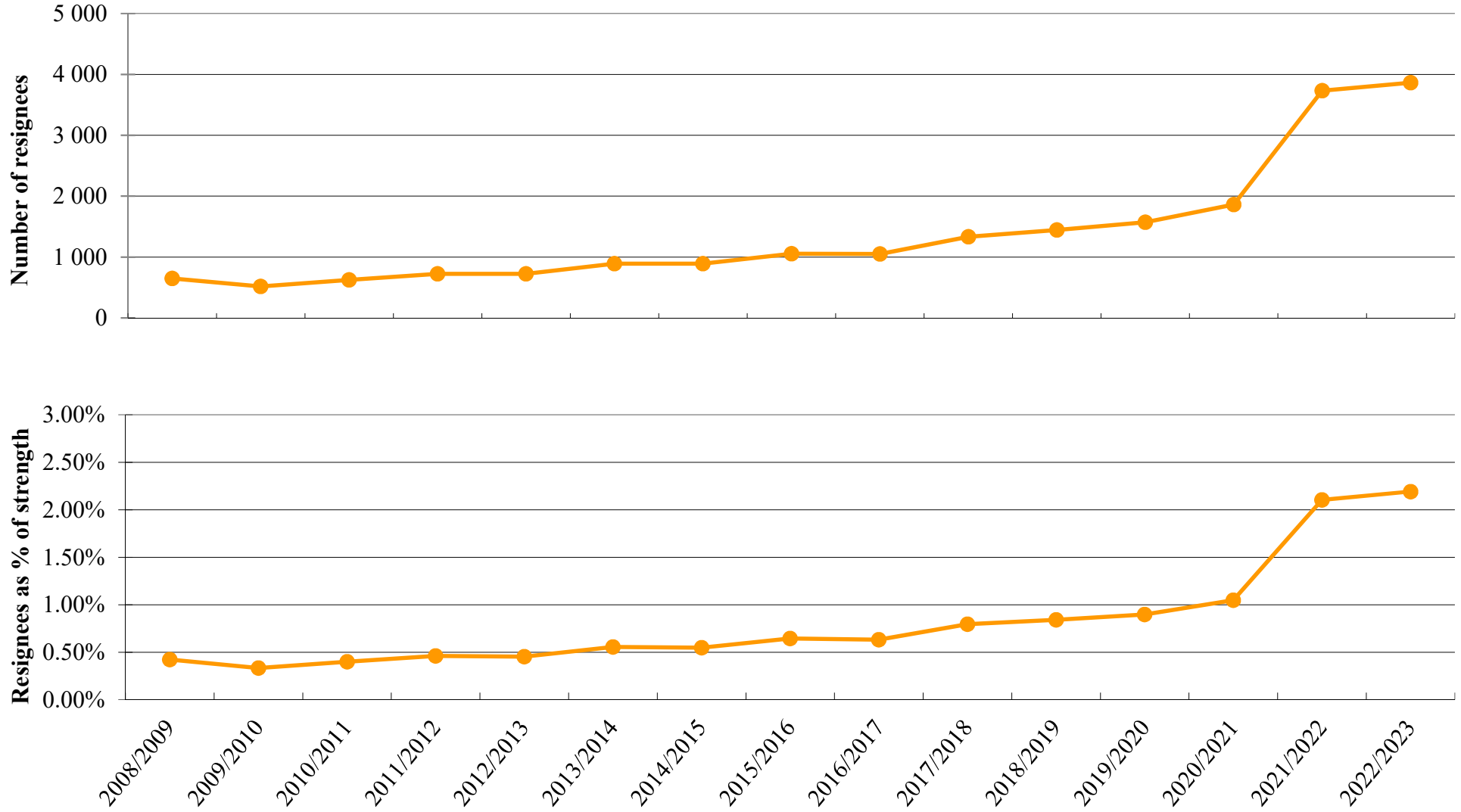
### Retirement Position of the Civil Service from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023



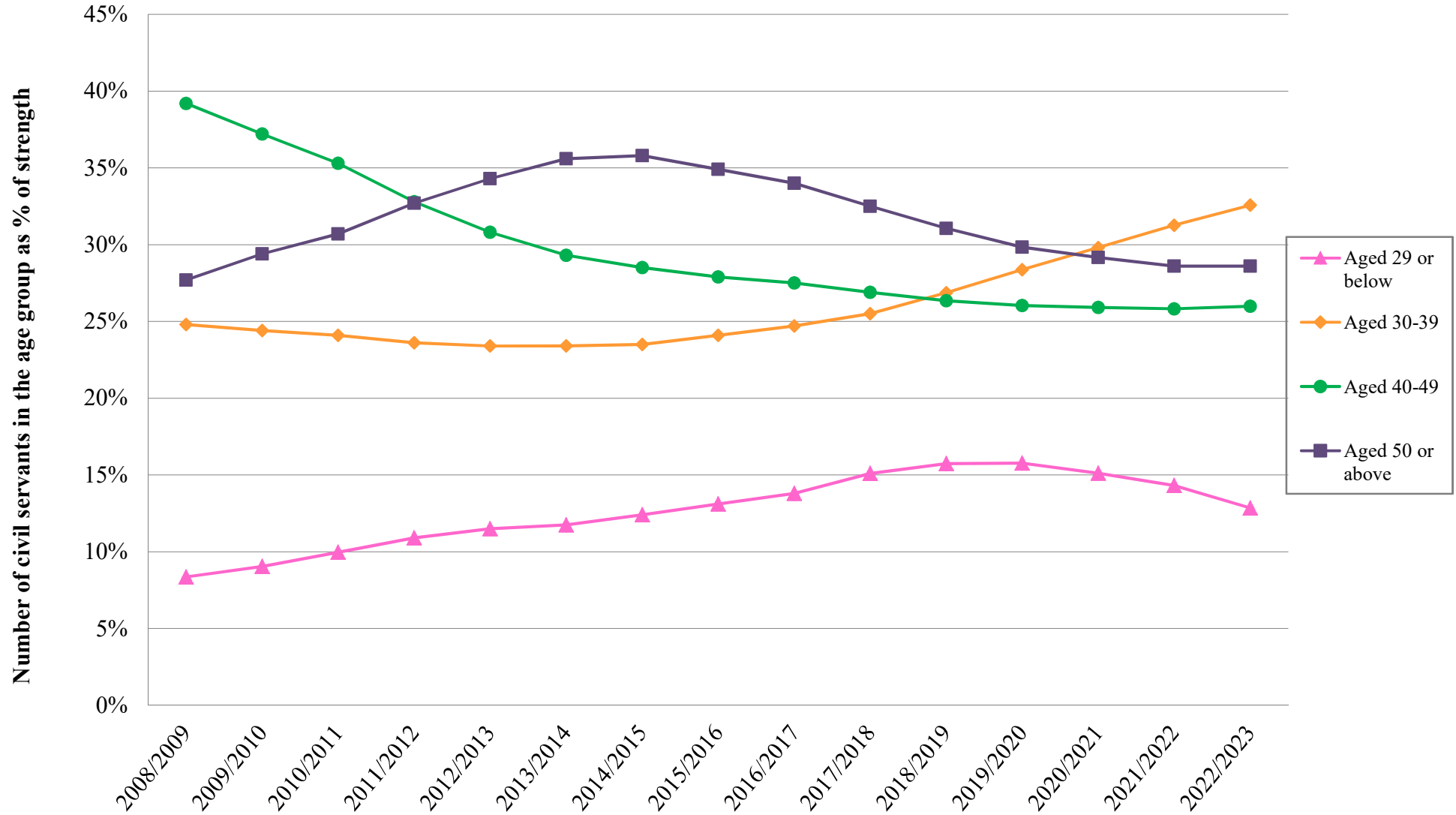
### Retirement Position of Directorate Civil Servants from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023



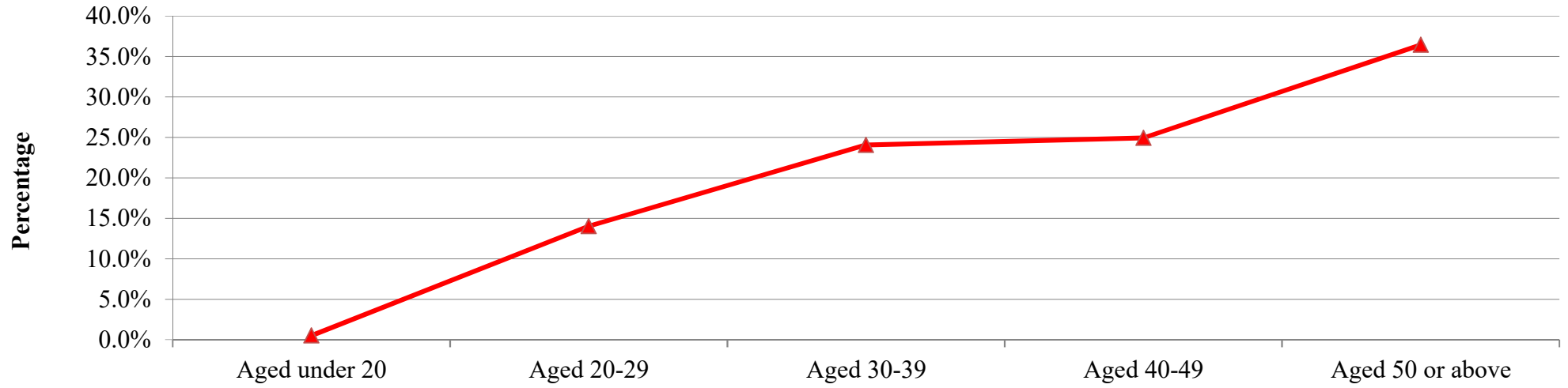
### Resignation Position of the Civil Service from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023



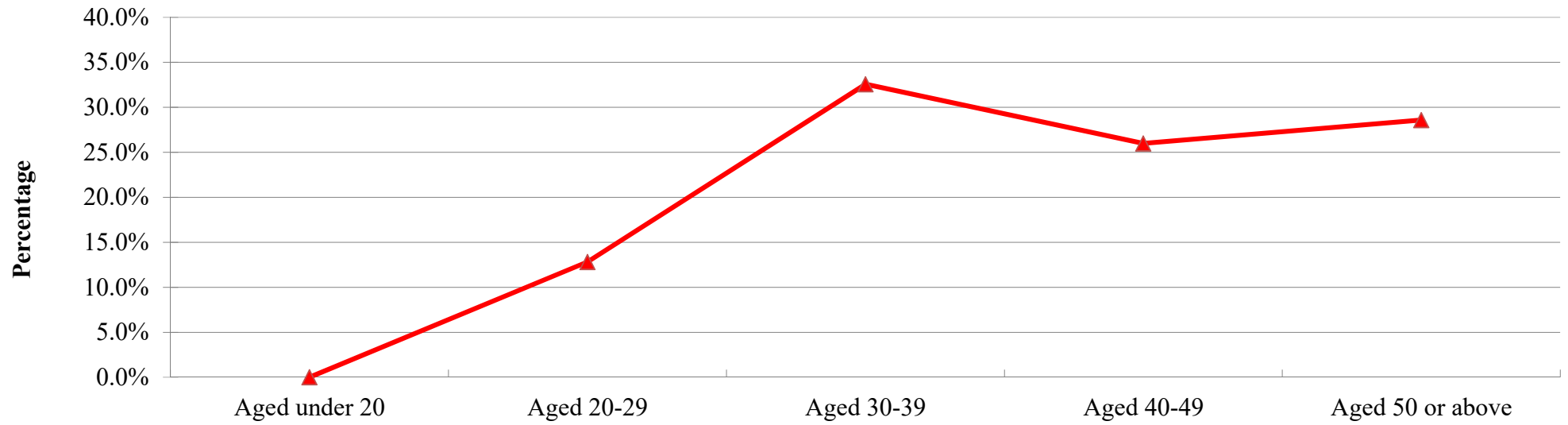
### Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023



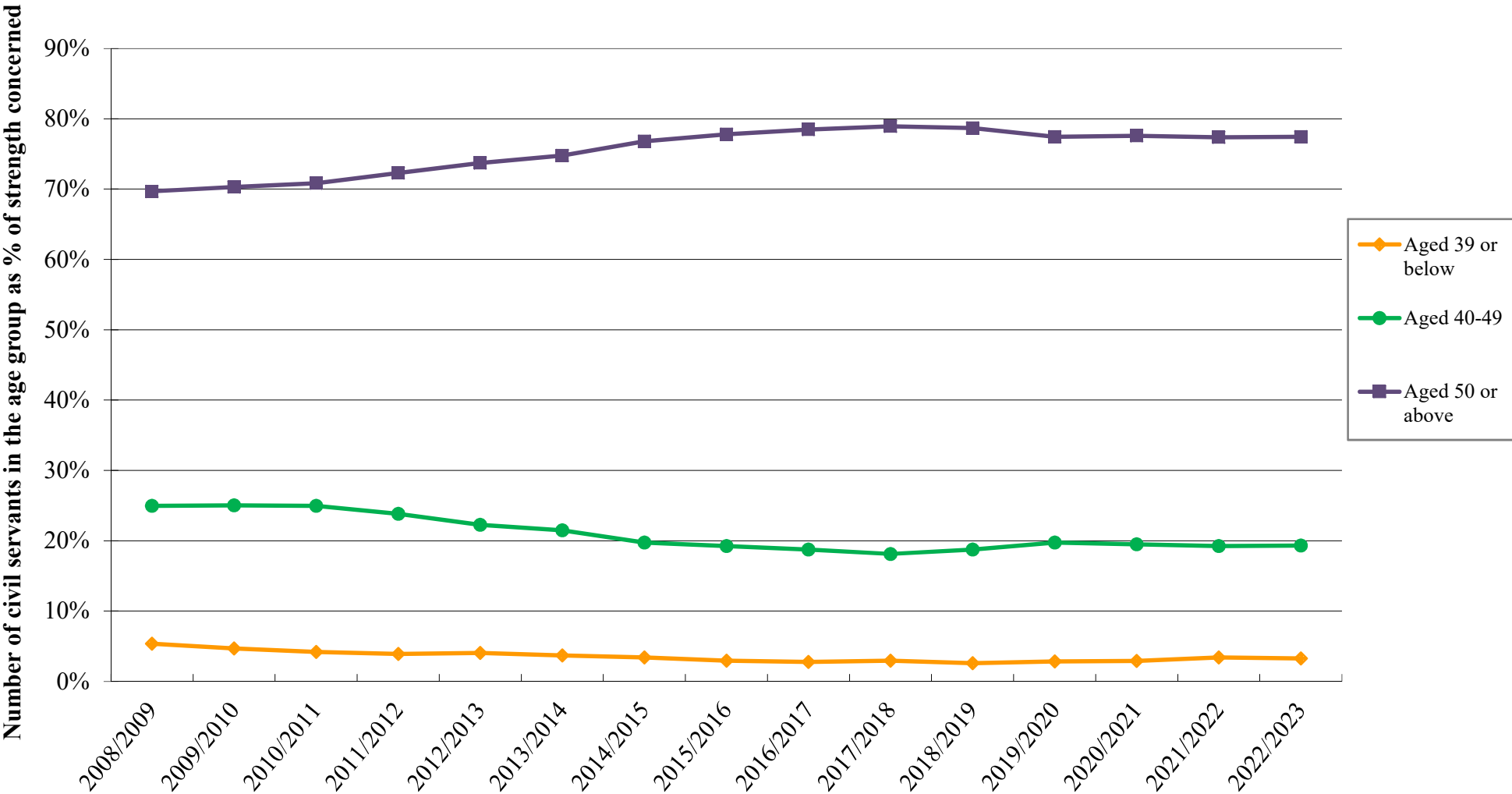
**Age Profile of the Hong Kong Labour Force 2023**



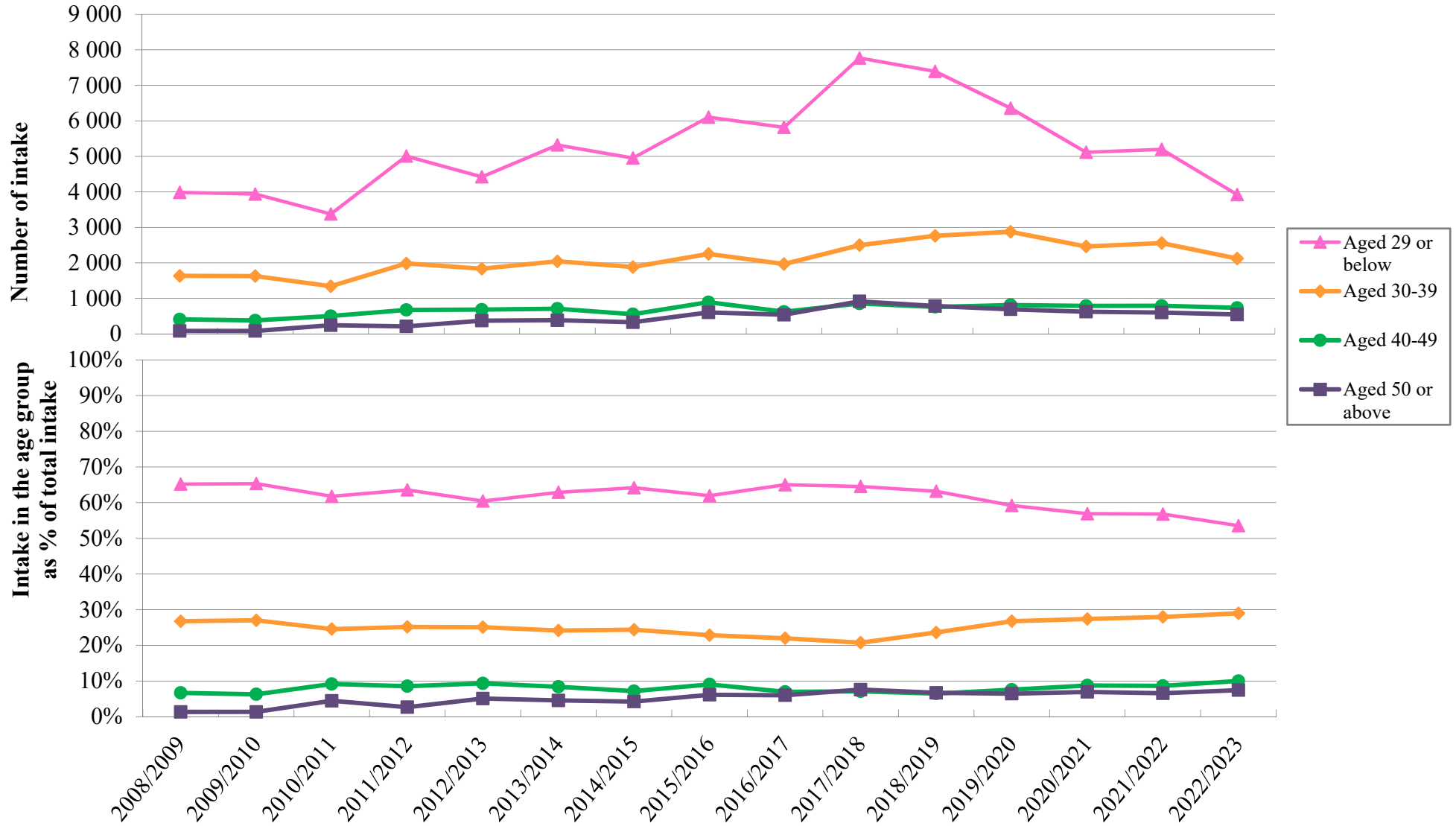
**Age Profile of the Civil Service 2023**



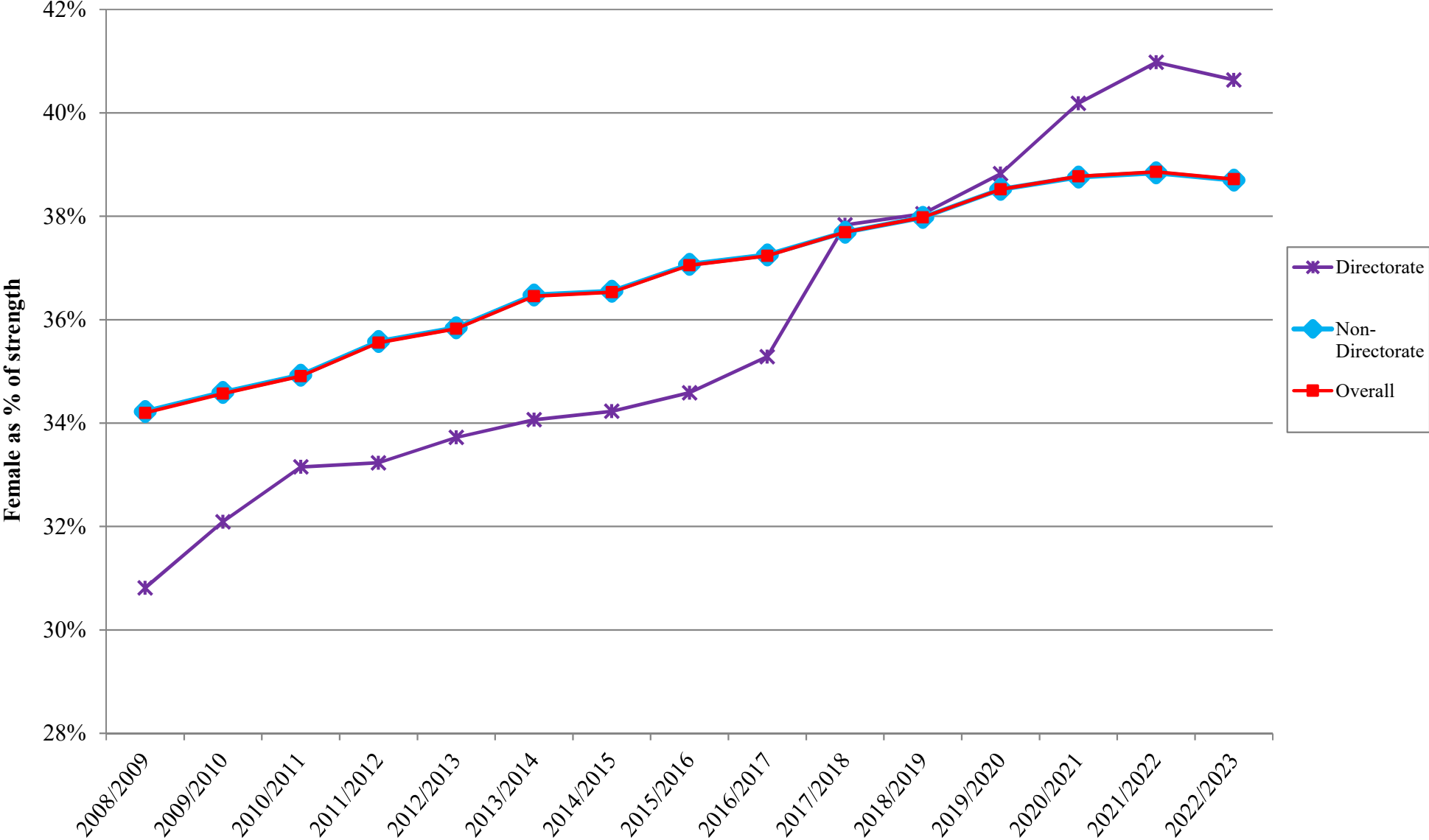
Directorate Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023



**Intake of Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023**



Percentage of Female (by Rank) in the Civil Service from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023





**Percentage of Female (by Rank) in the Civil Service  
(excluding Officers on Police Pay Scale and Disciplined Services Pay Scales)  
from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023**

