

For discussion on
17 May 2021

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)¹ of the civil service for the last 15 years since 2006-07 are shown at **Annex A**.

3. As shown at **Annex A**, the number of civil servants maintained at a relatively low level before 2007-08, mainly because of the implementation of enhanced efficiency drives since 2000, the two general voluntary retirement (VR) schemes in 2000 and 2003, the targeted VR schemes for specific grades between 2000 and 2006, and the six years of open recruitment freeze which ended in March 2007 (namely from 1999-2000 to 2006-07, save for 2001-02 and 2002-03²). As at 31 March 2007, the civil service establishment and strength stood at around 159 000 and 154 000 respectively.

4. Since 2007-08, the civil service has been growing steadily to meet the demand for new or improved public services. In the five-year period from

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

² Where there were strong operational needs, exceptional approval was given for a limited number of grades to conduct open recruitment during the period of open recruitment freeze.

2016-17 to 2020-21, the civil service establishment had increased aggregately by around 16 900, representing an annual average increase of around 3 400. During the same period, about 13 100 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.

5. As at 31 March 2021, the civil service establishment was around 192 000, and the strength was around 178 000 which represented about 2.4% of the population and about 4.6% of the labour force of Hong Kong. As reflected in the 2021-22 Budget, there will be zero growth in the civil service establishment in 2021-22 to strengthen fiscal discipline.

(b) Directorate and Non-directorate

6. 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 2021, the establishment and strength at the non-directorate level were about 191 000 and 176 000 respectively, and those at the directorate level were about 1 500 and 1 400 respectively.

7. Noting the views of the Members of the Legislative Council on the creation of directorate posts under the current situation, as announced by the Chief Executive in the 2020 Policy Address, the Government withdrew all the staff establishment proposals awaiting scrutiny then and reviewed them individually. After the review, the Government has converted all proposals of permanent directorate posts in 2020-21 legislative session into time-limited supernumerary directorate posts with duration ranging from three years to a maximum of five years, with the exception of creation of one permanent post in the Judiciary. In addition, the Government has scaled down some of the proposals and reduced the number of proposed directorate posts.

Wastage

8. In 2020-21, the wastage in the civil service was about 8 500, accounting for around 4.8% 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

9. 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 the civilian grades and 60 in respect of the disciplined services grades, regardless of their ranks.

10. The retirement³ position of the civil service over the last 15 years is shown at **Annex B**. The number of retirees was around 6 000 in 2020-21 which represented about 3.4% of the strength. As regards directorate civil servants, the number of retirees ranged between 6.2% and 11.7% of the directorate strength. The number stood at around 9.9% in 2020-21. Details are at **Annex C**.

11. Based on the existing normal 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 2020-21. The number will then gradually decline to about 3.2% in the five-year period ending 2025-26, to about 2.8% in the five-year period ending 2030-31, to about 2.1% in the five-year period ending 2035-36, and to about 1.4% in the five-year period ending 2040-41.

12. It is noteworthy that to be more targeted in achieving the goal of expanding the labour force, 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) within the two-year option period from 17 September 2018 to 16 September 2020 (hereafter referred to as “the Option”). Eligible civil servants’ response to the Option was satisfactory. Among some 56 000 eligible civil servants (comprising about 35 000 civilian officers and 21 000 disciplined services officers), about 28 000 civilian officers and 19 000 disciplined services officers (i.e. a total of about 47 000 eligible civil servants, or 83% of them) had taken the Option.

(b) Resignation

13. Although the departures of civil servants due to resignation have risen moderately in recent years, the percentage remained at a low level. As shown at **Annex D**, the resignation rate ranged from 0.63% to 1.05% of the strength

³ For the purpose of this paper, “retirement” covers normal retirement, early retirement and re-employment after retirement without a break in service.

of the civil service in the five-year period from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The majority of the resignees left before the end of their probationary period. It is understandable that probationers, who are at the initial stage of their civil service career, would leave the service during their probationary period if they find it unsuitable to develop a long-term career in the Government.

Age Profile⁴

14. 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 2019-20, the age groups of 40-49 and 50 or above constituted about 26% and 30% 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 44% of the civil service strength. The age profile of the civil service is in line with that of the labour force of Hong Kong, as shown at **Annex F**.

15. **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 2005-06, before increasing moderately starting from 2018-19. The age group of 50 or above remained the largest group, representing about 77% of its strength in 2019-20.

16. As shown at **Annex H**, new recruits to the civil service were mainly young people. In the five-year period from 2015-16 to 2019-20, there were around 33 000 new recruits in the age group of 20-29 (or about 62% of the total intake) and around 12 400 new recruits in the age group of 30-39 (or about 23% of the total intake). As shown at **Annex E**, the number of civil servants in the age group of 20-29 has been increasing from about 7.1% of the civil service strength in 2006-07 to about 15.7% in 2019-20.

Gender Profile⁵

17. 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 33.6% in 2005-06 to around 38.5% in 2019-20. The rising trend of female participation is observed in both directorate and non-directorate ranks during the period, the proportion for which increased from

⁴ The 2020-21 figures of the age profile of the civil service are not yet available.

⁵ The 2020-21 figures of the gender profile of the civil service are not yet available.

around 27.9% in 2005-06 to around 38.8% in 2019-20 and from around 33.7% in 2005-06 to around 38.5% in 2019-20 respectively.

18. Furthermore, the rising trend of female participation rate is more prominent in respect of civilian grades. Specifically, the participation rate of female civilian civil servants⁶ rose from around 43.4% in 2005-06 to around 49% in 2019-20, under which the proportion increased from around 30.3% in 2005-06 to around 40.9% in 2019-20 for directorate officers, and from around 43.5% in 2005-06 to around 49% in 2019-20 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 45.4% in 2006 to around 50.1% in 2019. The participation rate of female civilian officers was also on par with that in the labour force of Hong Kong. As at 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2021, of the 18 Permanent Secretary posts ranked at Point 8 of the Directorate Pay Scale (i.e. the top civil service positions), 11 (or 61.1%) and 14 (or 77.8%) were filled respectively by female officers.

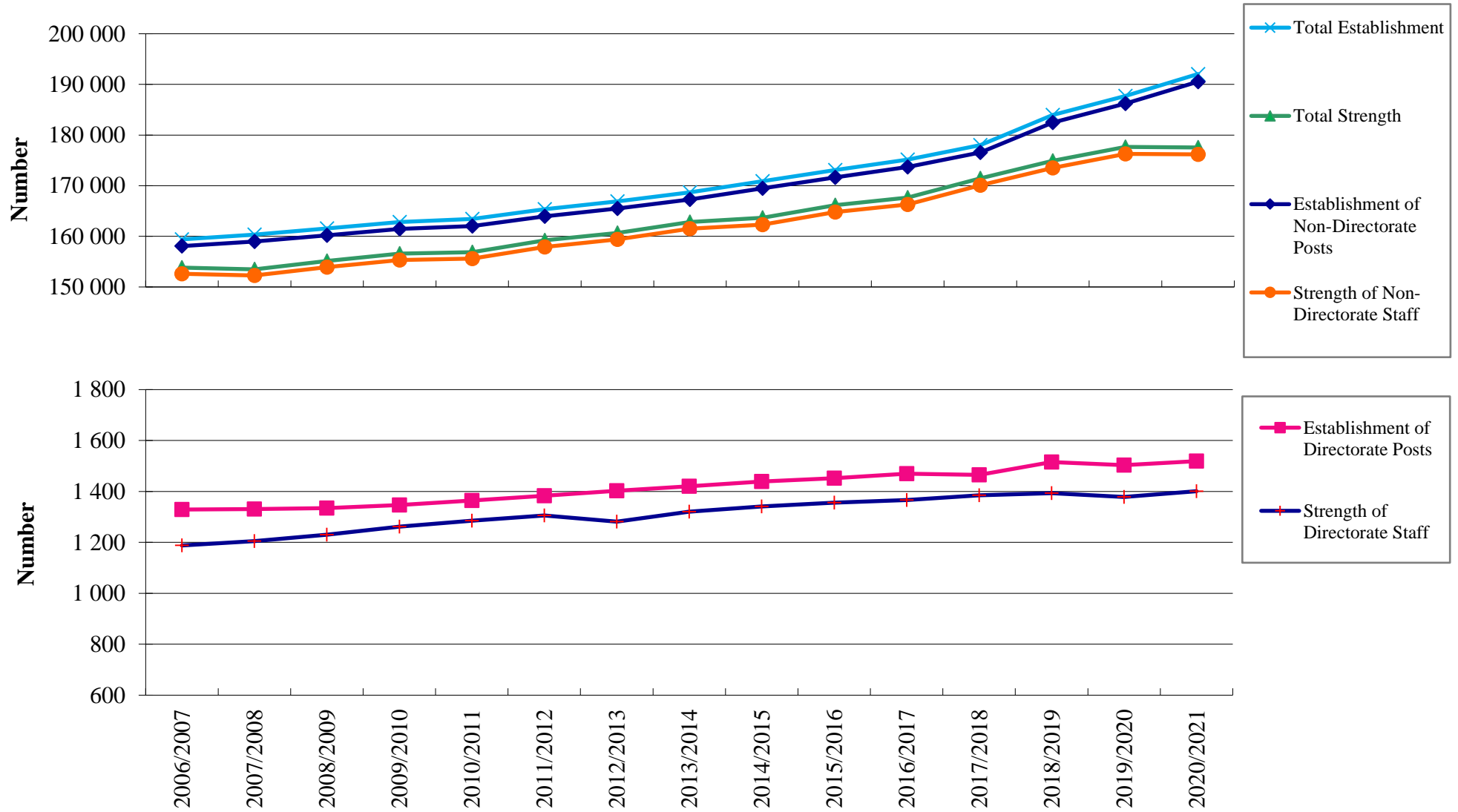
Advice Sought

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

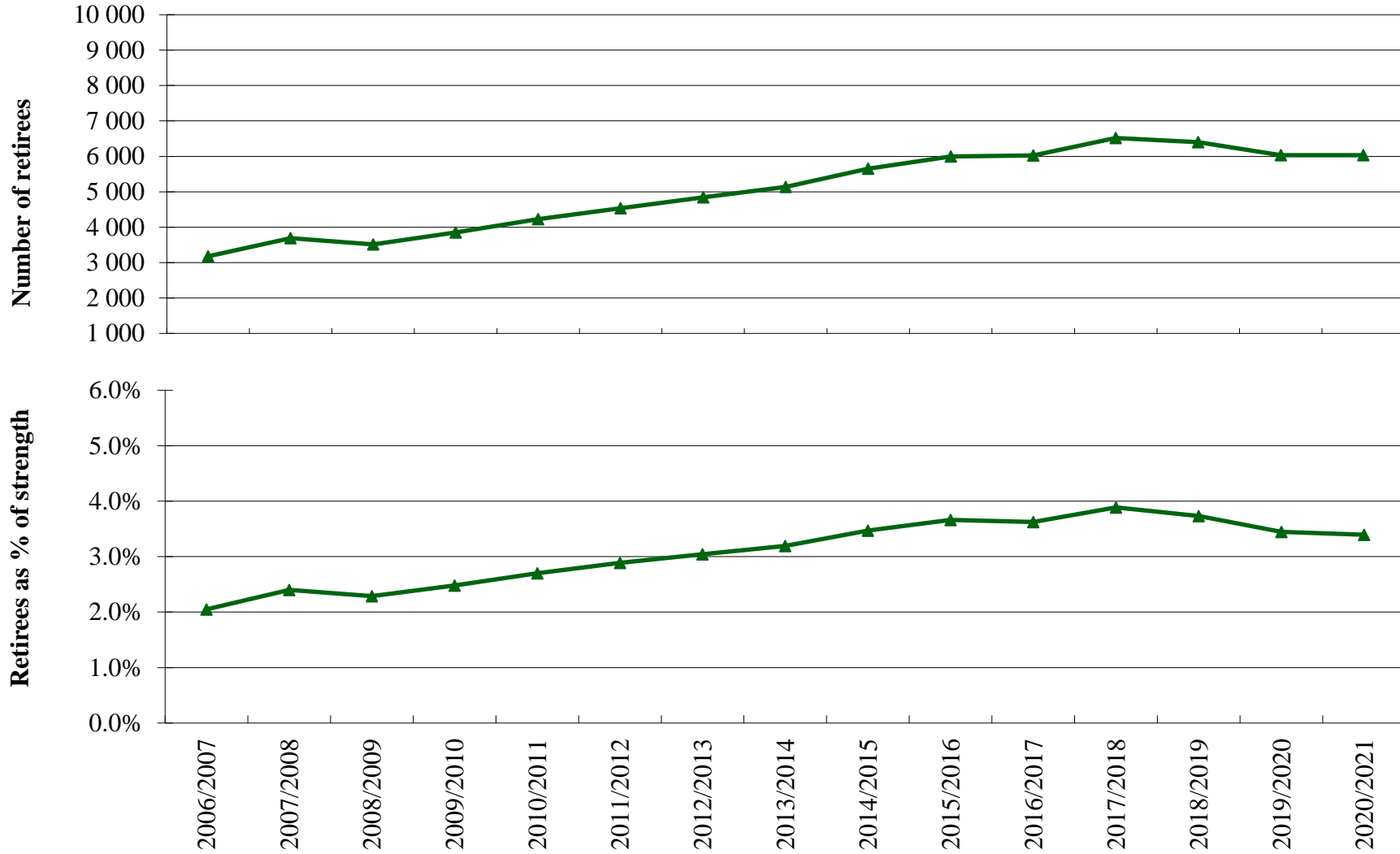
Civil Service Bureau
May 2021

⁶ Calculated by excluding all civil servants who are serving in the disciplined services and remunerated by the Police Pay Scale (PPS) and General Disciplined Services Pay Scale (GDSPS).

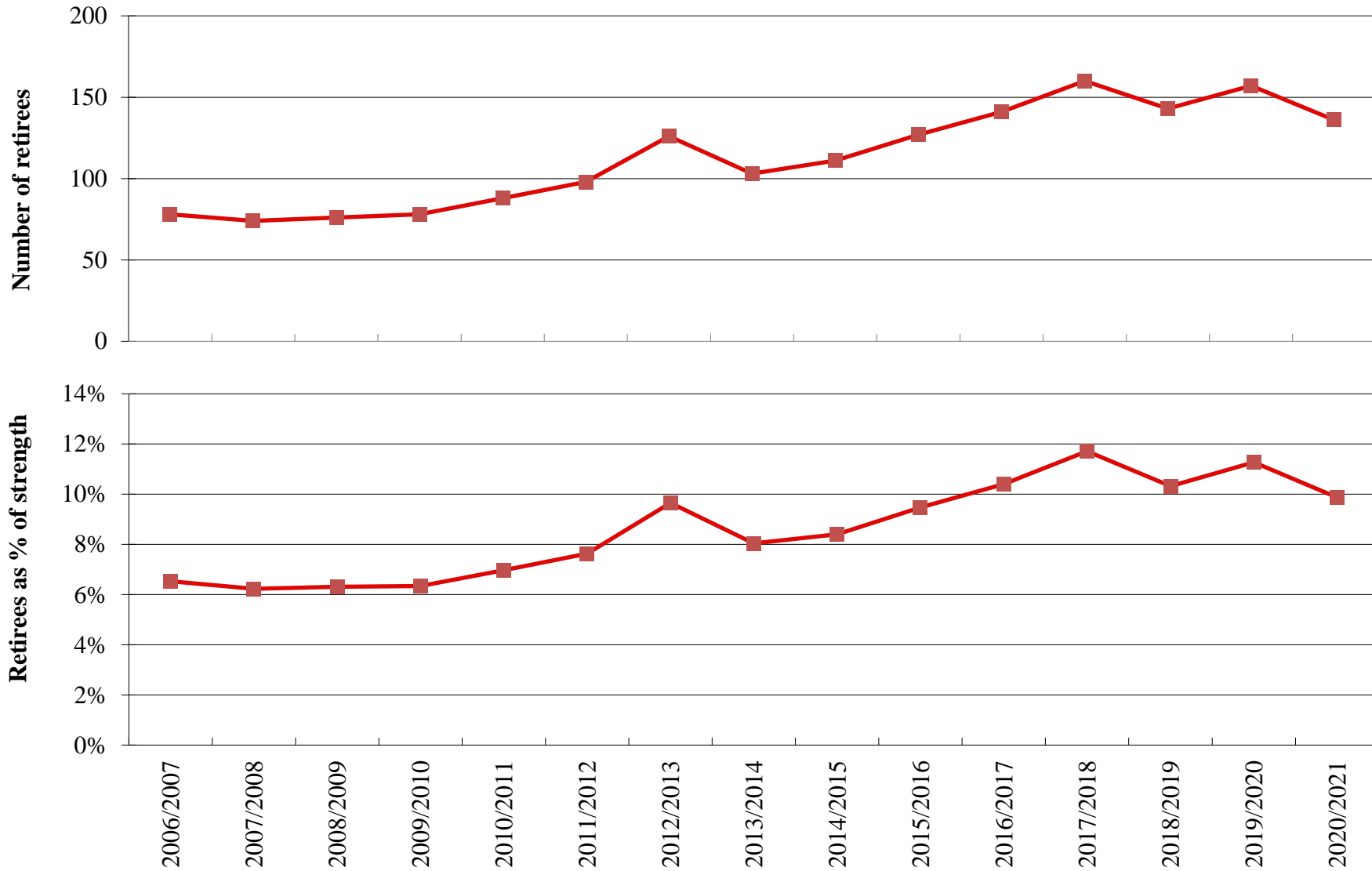
Establishment and Strength of the Civil Service from 2006-2007 to 2020-2021



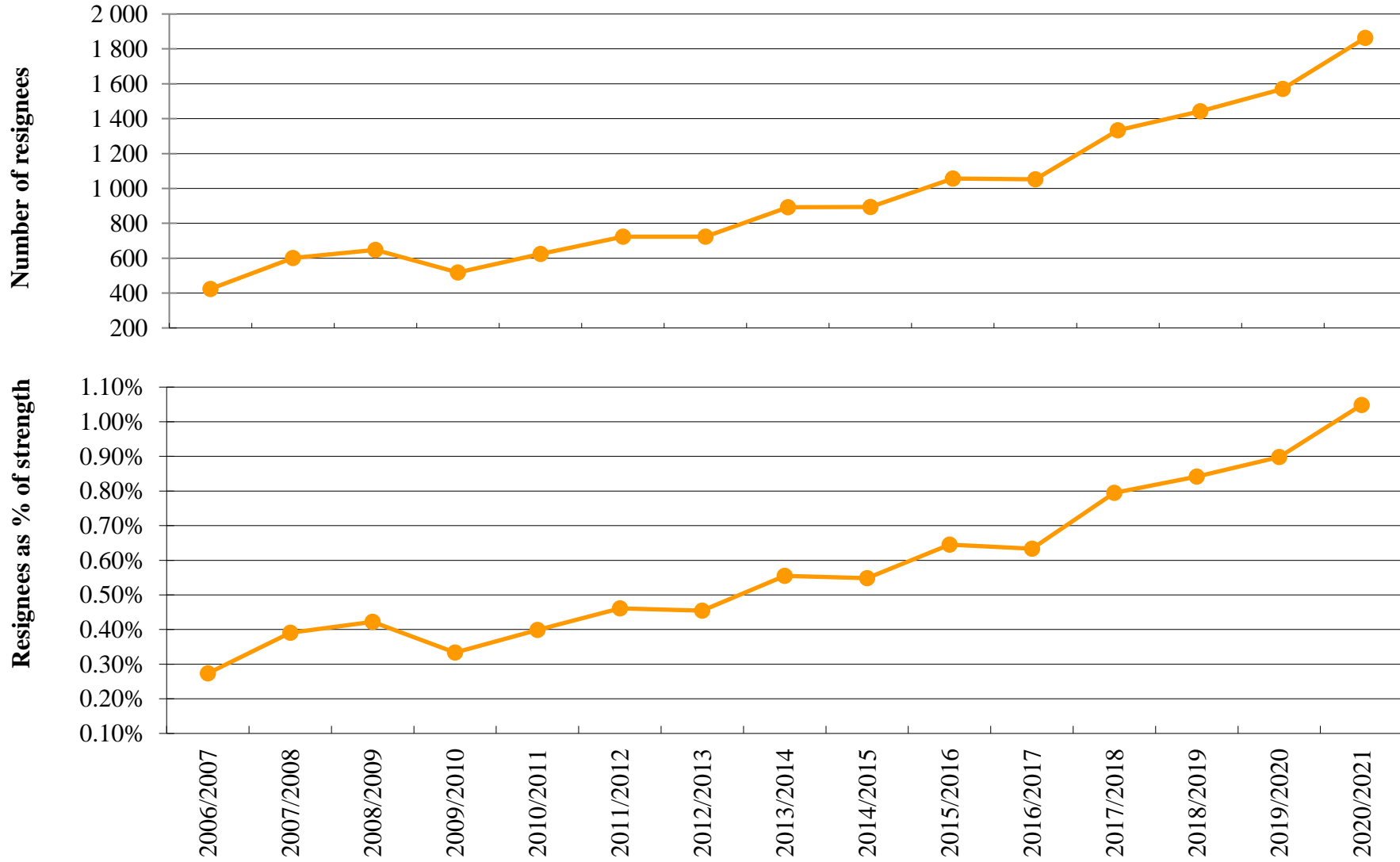
Retirement Position of the Civil Service from 2006-2007 to 2020-2021



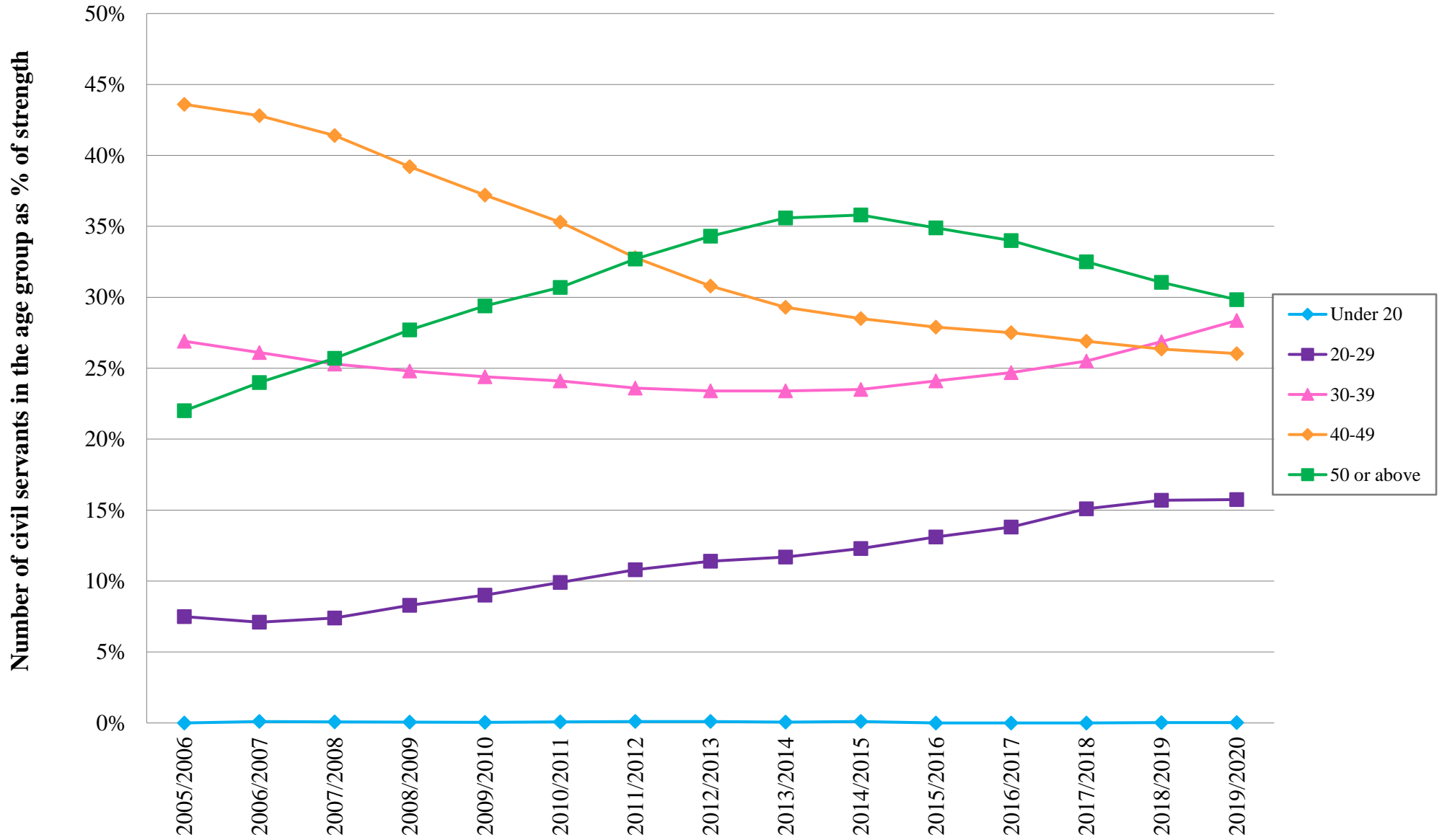
Retirement Position of Directorate Civil Servants from 2006-2007 to 2020-2021



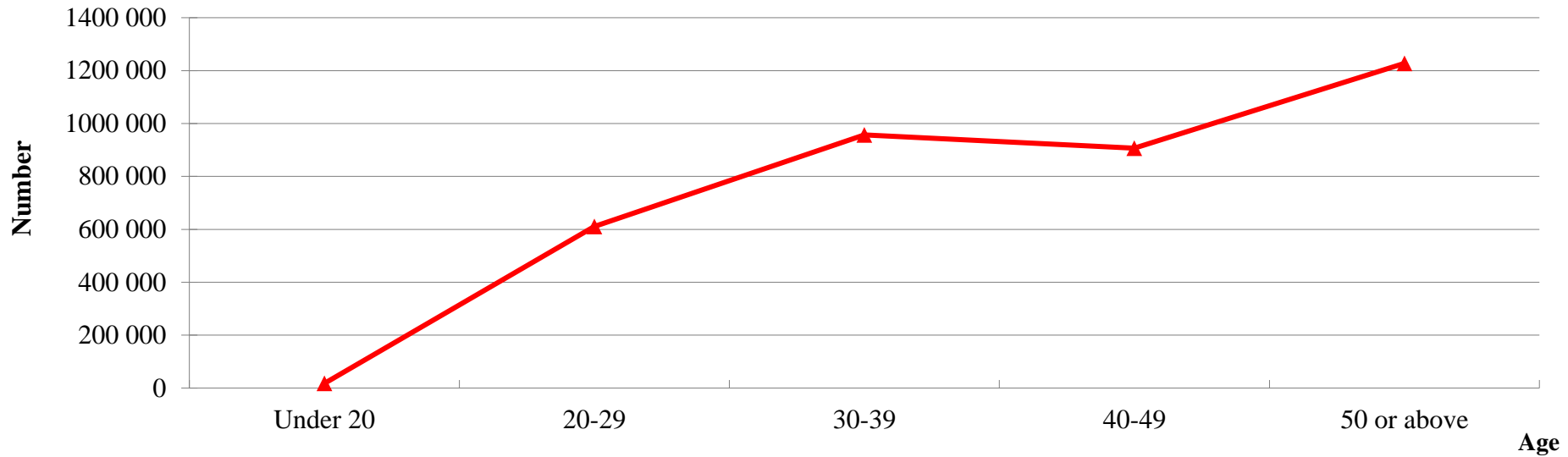
Resignation Position of the Civil Service from 2006-2007 to 2020-2021



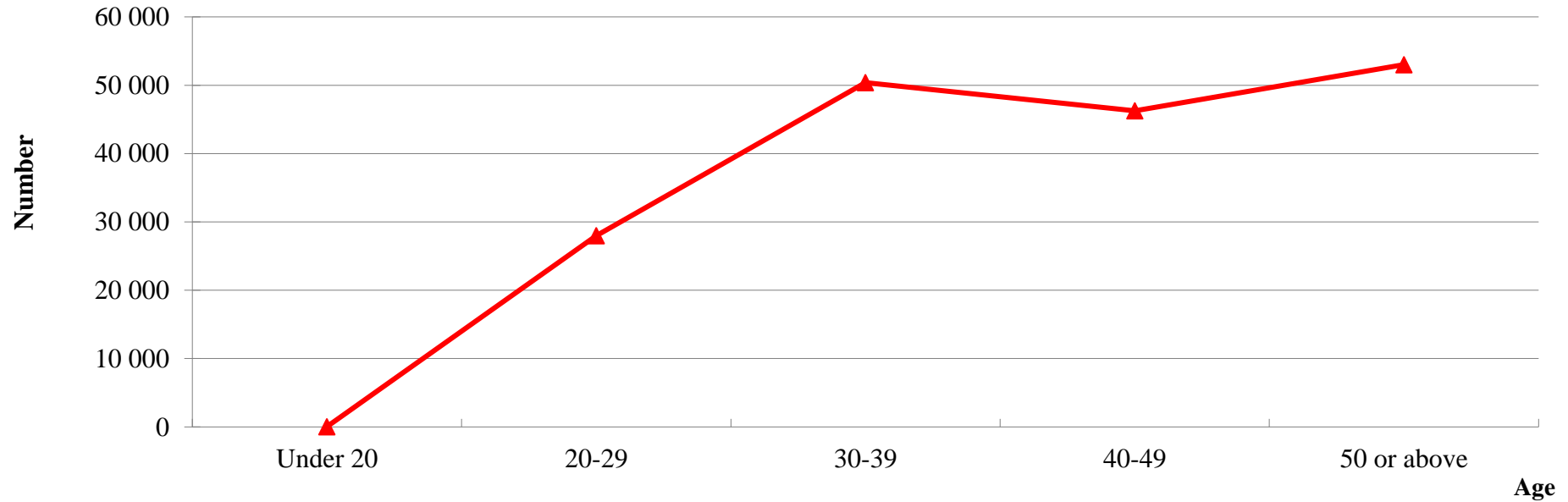
Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2005-2006 to 2019-2020



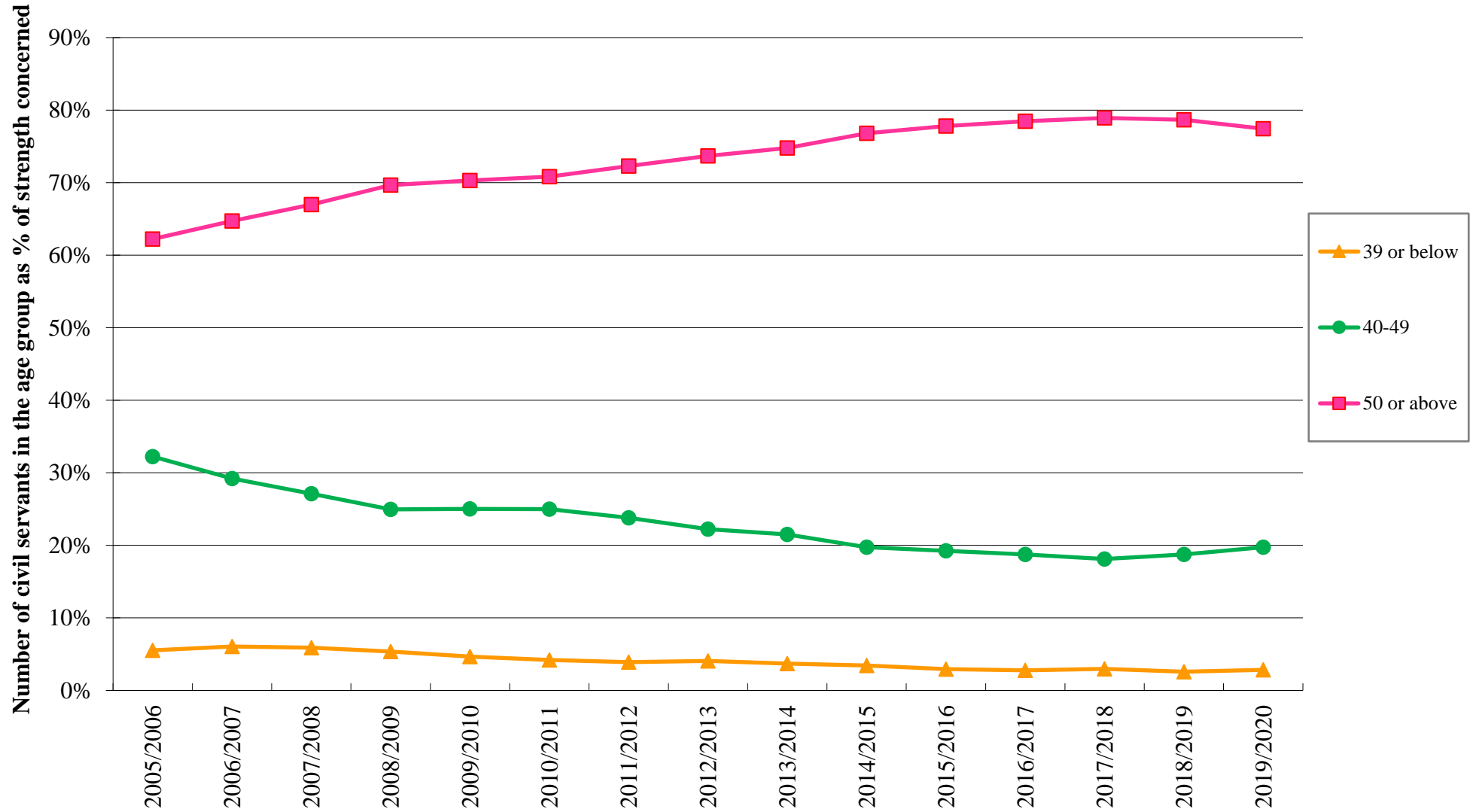
Age Profile of the Hong Kong Labour Force 2020



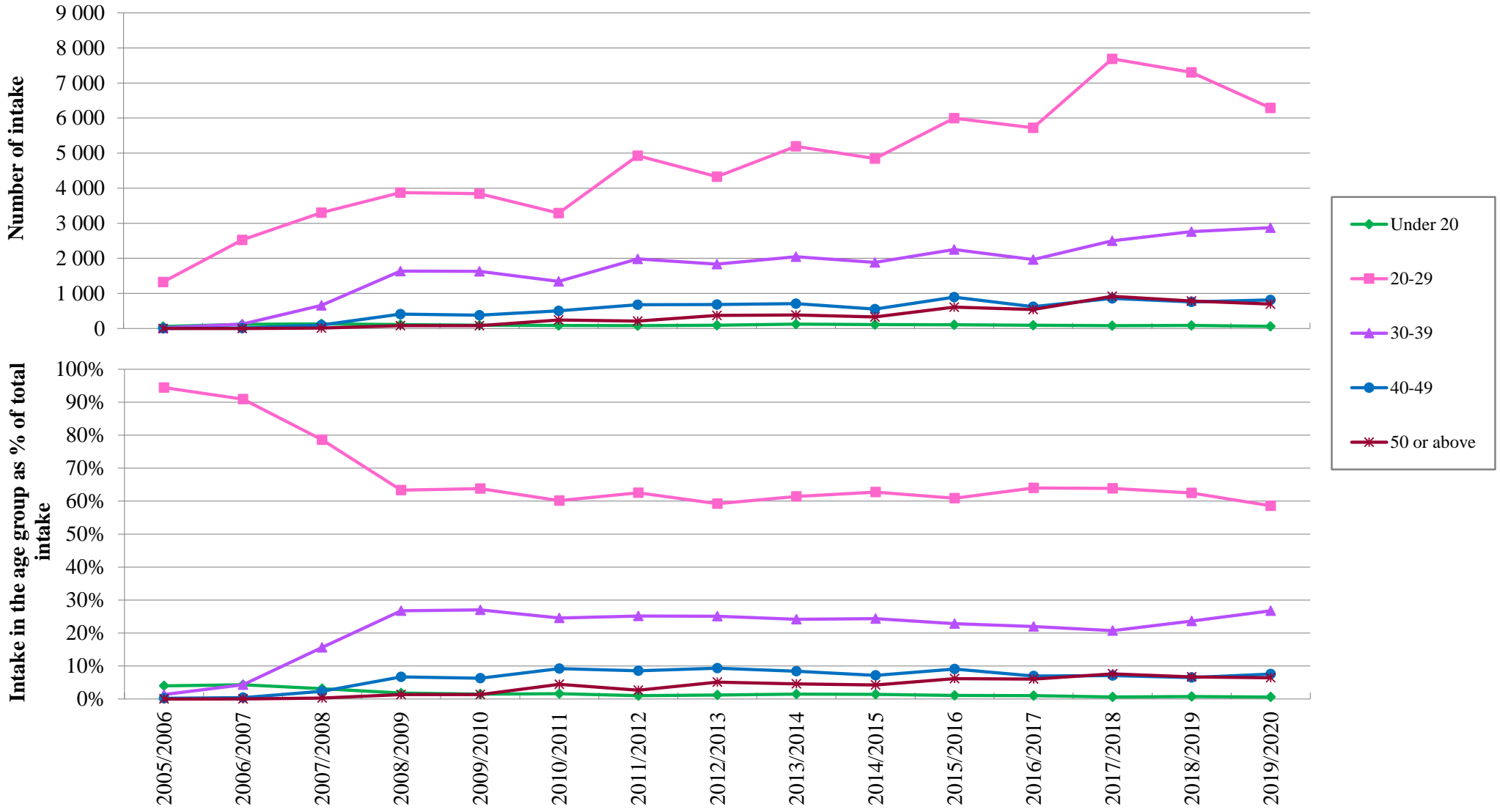
Age Profile of the Civil Service 2020



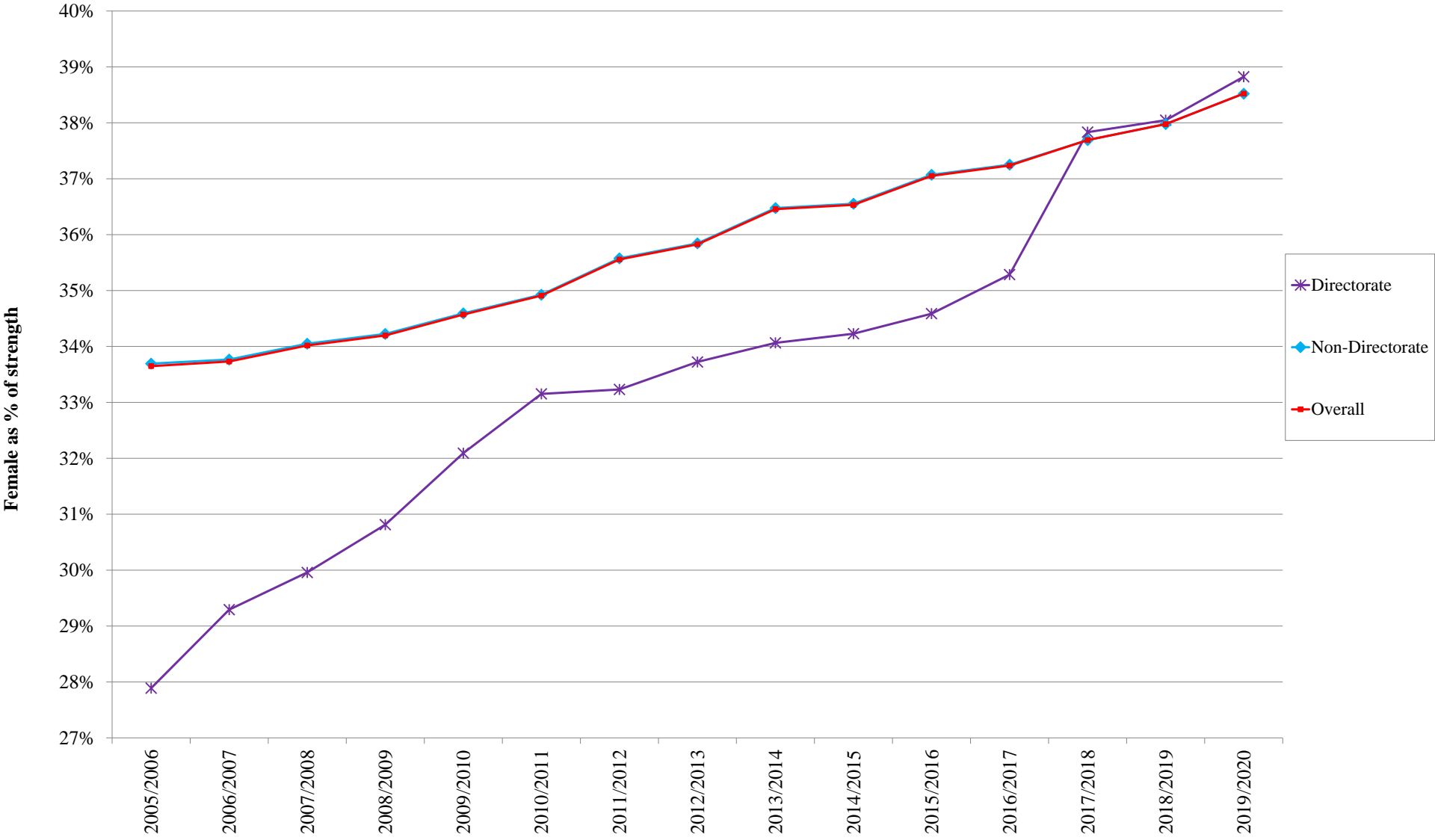
Directorate Civil Servants by Age Groups from 2005-2006 to 2019-2020



**Intake of Civil Servants by Age Groups
from 2005-2006 to 2019-2020**



Percentage of Female (by Rank) in the Civil Service from 2005-2006 to 2019-2020



**Percentage of Female (by Rank) in the Civil Service (excluding Officers on PPS and GDSPS)
from 2005-2006 to 2019-2020**

