



Challenges in Reinforcing the Human Resource Base of the SDF

Ministry of Defense
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1 Current status of securing the human resource base

Japan is facing structural challenges such as population decline and a rapidly aging society. The Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces are also engaged in an increasingly competitive labor market, making the securing of personnel ever more difficult.

Structure of competition to secure human resources

- 1 Decreasing number of people eligible for recruitment
- 2 Rising rates of enrollment in higher education
- 3 Rising Job-Opening-to-Applicant Ratio for new high-School graduates

Current Status of the Self-Defense Forces' Human Resource Base

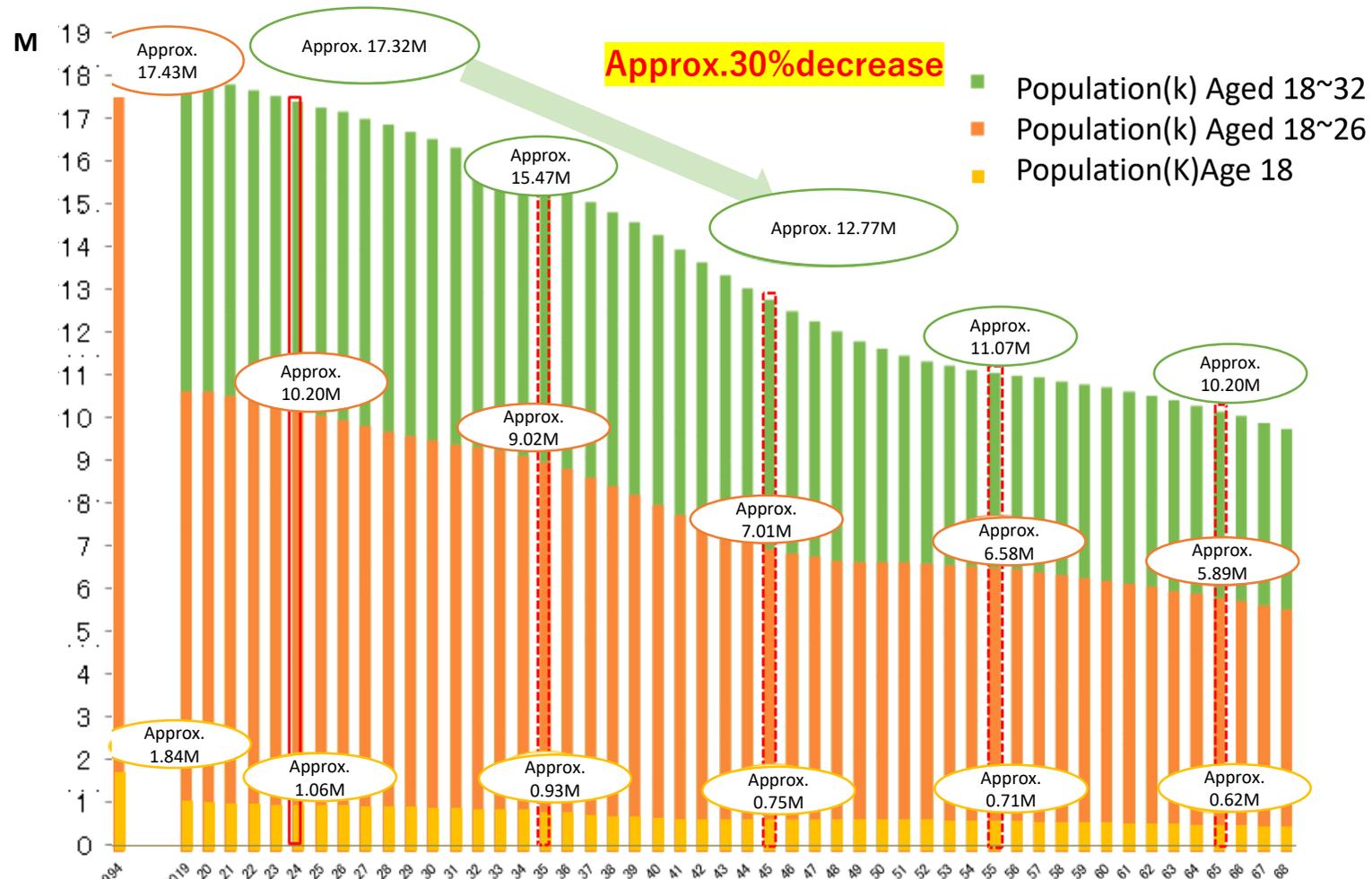
- 1 Decline in applicants for uniformed JSDF personnel
- 2 Decline in the number of recruitments for JSDF Candidates and General NCO Candidates, which primarily targets high-school graduates
- 3 Increase in mid-career resignations from the self-defense forces
- 4 Continued low fill rates of JSDF Reserve Personnel and others

Structure of Competition for Human Resources

1

Decreasing number of people eligible for recruitment

- ✓ Even after accounting for the 2018 rising upper age limit for the recruitment (from 26 to 32), the population of eligible candidates remains roughly the same as it was twenty years ago. As of FY2024, the population aged 18 to 32 is approximately equivalent to the population aged 18 to 26 in FY1994.
- ✓ Looking ahead, the eligible population is projected to decline further, **decreasing by about 30 percent between FY2024 and FY2045.**



【Material sources】 The numbers for FY1994 and FY2019 are based on “Population Estimates of Japan 1920 - 2000” and “Current Population Estimates,” Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Data from FY2020 onward are based on “Population Projection for Japan” (medium estimates in April 2023), National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

Structure of competition for human resources

In addition to the decline in eligible recruitment population,

② rising university enrollment rates and other factors have pushed up ③ the job-opening-to-applicant ratio for new high-school graduates. Overall, competition for human resources is intensifying, and this trend is especially severe for high-school graduates — the primary target group for “JSDF Candidates and General NCO” Candidates.

2

Declining pool of high-school graduates available for recruitment due to rising university enrollment rates

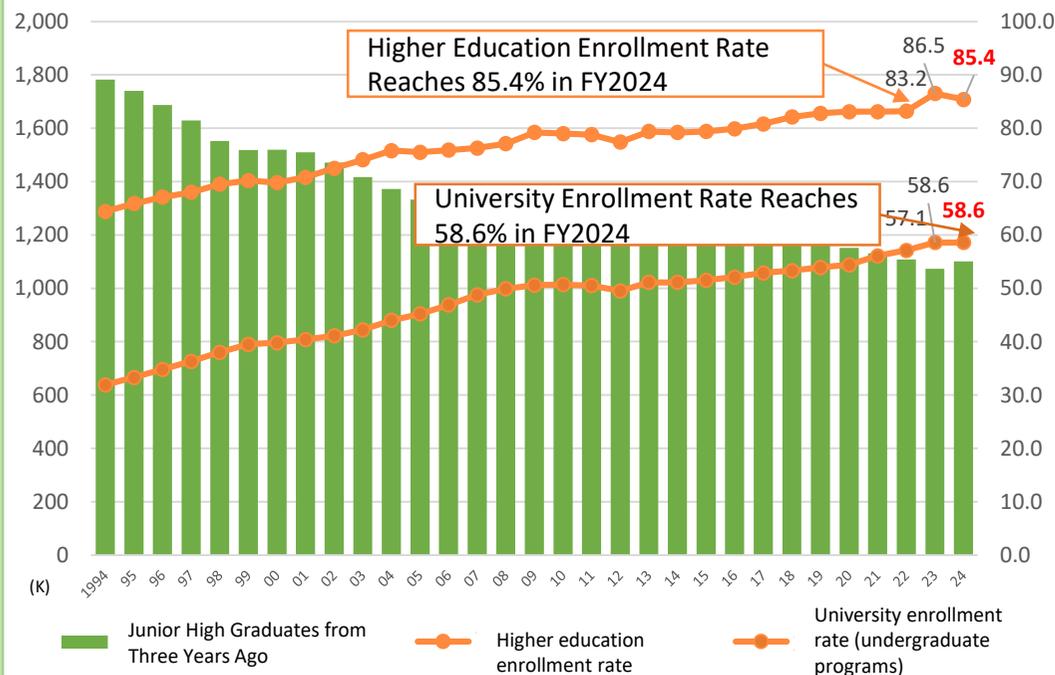
- ✓ The advancement rate of upper-secondary school graduates to higher education institutions has reached an all-time high. Nearly 90% now go on to higher education.

3

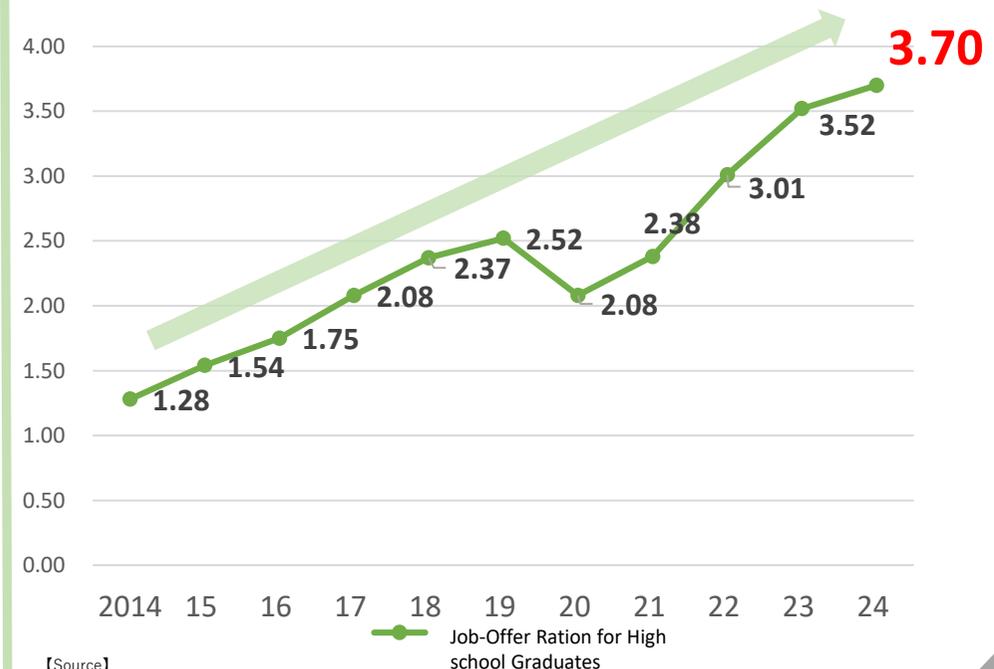
The rising job-offer ratio for new high school graduates

- ✓ Since fiscal year 2021, the job-offer ratio for new high school graduates has exceeded 3, reaching 3.7 in fiscal year 2024.

Trends in the higher education enrollment rate



Trend in the Job-Offer Ratio for High School Graduates



【Source】 Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-School Basic Survey for FY 2025 (December 2025)

【Source】 The job-offer ration for new high school graduates is based on figures as of end of the end of July of the graduation year, as reported in the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare's "Summary of Job Offers and Job Seekers for High School and junior High School Graduates at Public Employment Security Offices."

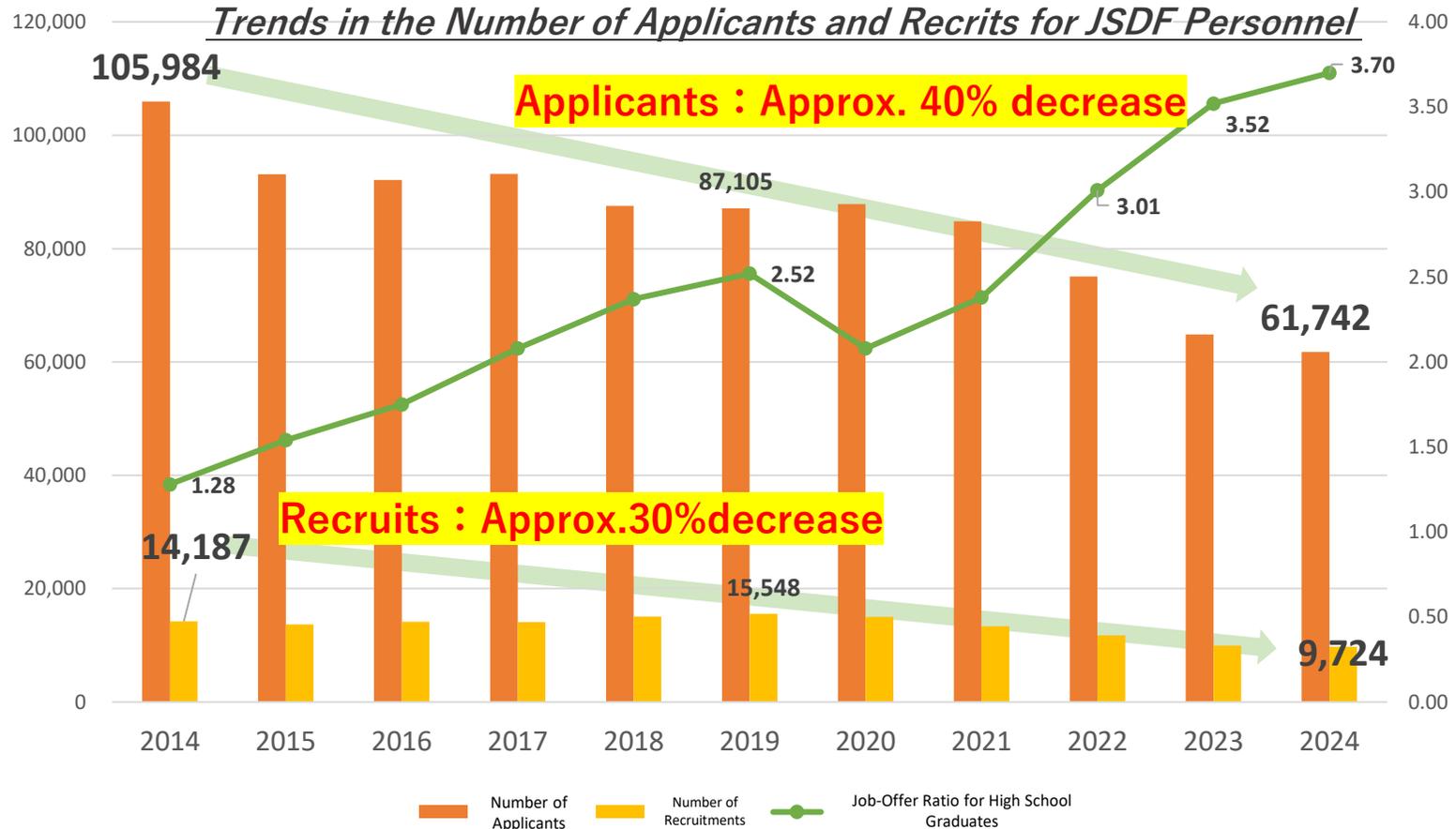
Current State of the Personnel Foundation of the Self-Defense Forces

Amid Intensifying Competition for human resources, the Ministry of Defense and the SDF Face Increasing Challenges in Securing Personnel.

1

Decline in Applicants and Recruits for JSDF Personnel

- ✓ Due to factors such as the declining birthrate, both the number of applicants and the number of recruitments for SDF personnel have been on a downward trend. Over the ten years from FY2014 to FY2024, the number **of applicants decreased by about 40% (approximately 44,000), while the number of recruitments fell by about 30% (around 4,500).**
- ※ The number of recruitments refers to those who ultimately enlisted, excluding individuals who passed the recruitment exam but chose other occupations. (The same applies to the next section.)



【Source】

The job-offer-to-applicant ratio for new high school graduates is based on figures as of the end of July of the graduation year for high school graduates, as compiled in the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's "Summary of Job Openings and Job Seekers Related to Public Employment Security Office (Hello Work) Job Listings for New High School and Junior High School Graduates."

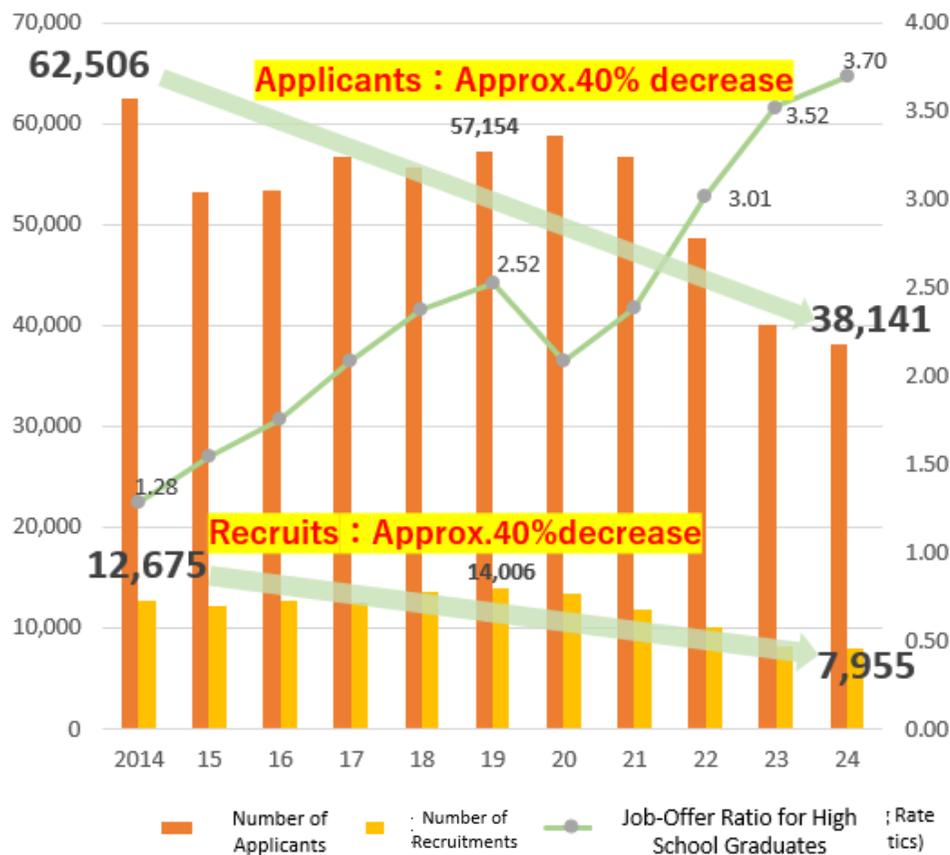
**Current State of the Personnel
Foundation of the Self-Defense Forces**

2

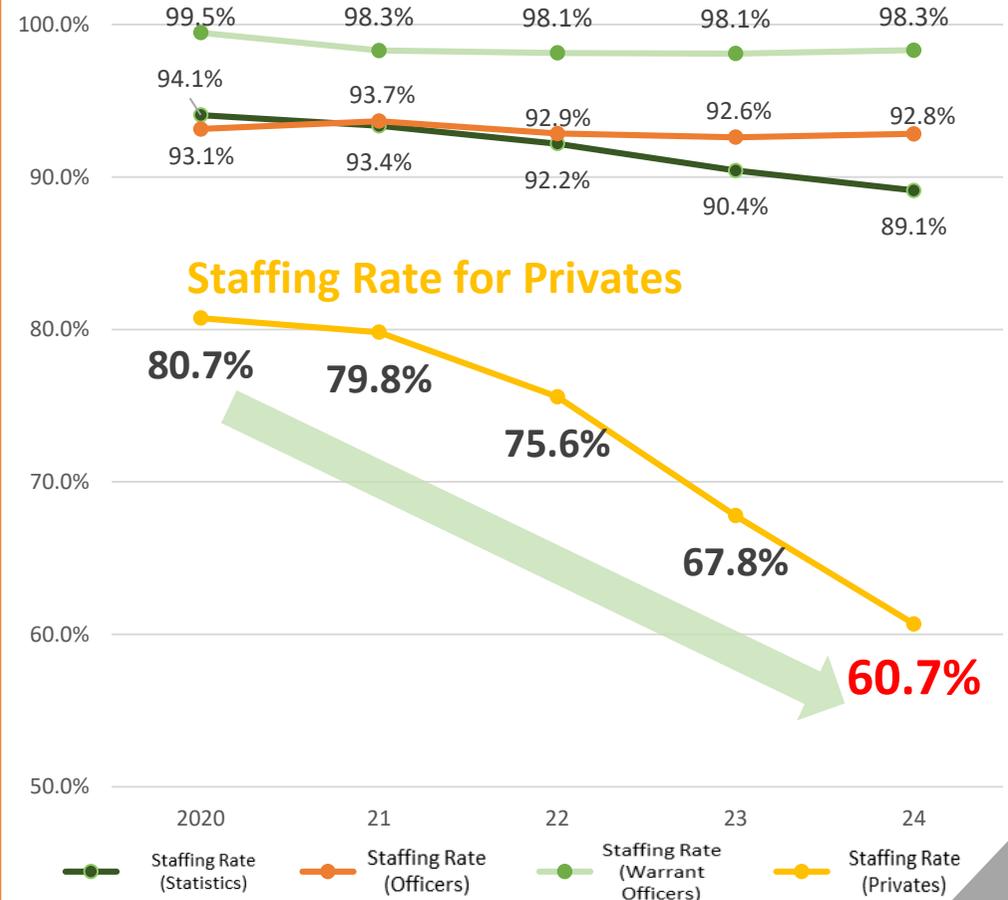
Decline in Recruitment for the Privates primarily targeting high school graduates

- ✓ Notably, the **recruitment of JSDF Candidates and General NCO Candidates is in a critical state**. From FY2014 to FY2024, **applicant numbers fell by approximately 40% (about 24,000)**, and the number of recruitments similarly declined by roughly 40% (around 4,700)
- ✓ The staffing rate **for privates has deteriorated sharply, falling to 60.7%**, compared with 92.8% for officers and 98.3% for warrant officers as of the end of FY2024

Trend in the Number of Applicants and Recruits for the Private



Trends in Staffing Rates



Current state of the Human Resource Base of the SDF

3

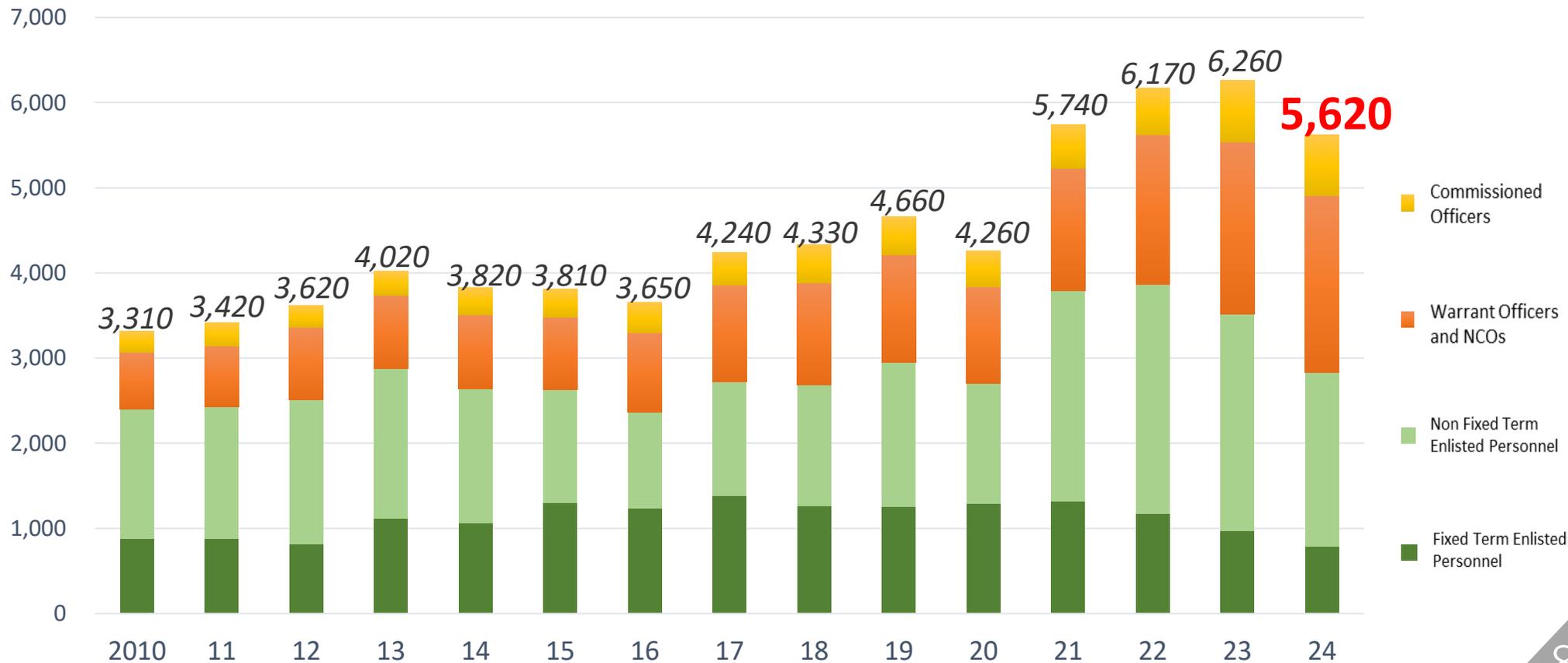
Increase in Mid-Career Resignations in the Self-Defense Forces

✓ Mid-career resignations are also on the rise, with 5,620 personnel leaving the Self-Defense Forces in FY2024.

Even if 10,000 personnel are recruited, an equivalent of about half leave due to mid-career resignations.

✓ A large proportion of **early-career recruits account for a substantial share of mid-career resignations.** Among all those who resign mid-career, **approximately 50% leave within their first five years of service** (FY2024data) .

Trends in the Number of Mid-Career Resignations* in the Self-Defense Forces



*The numbers are approximate estimates.

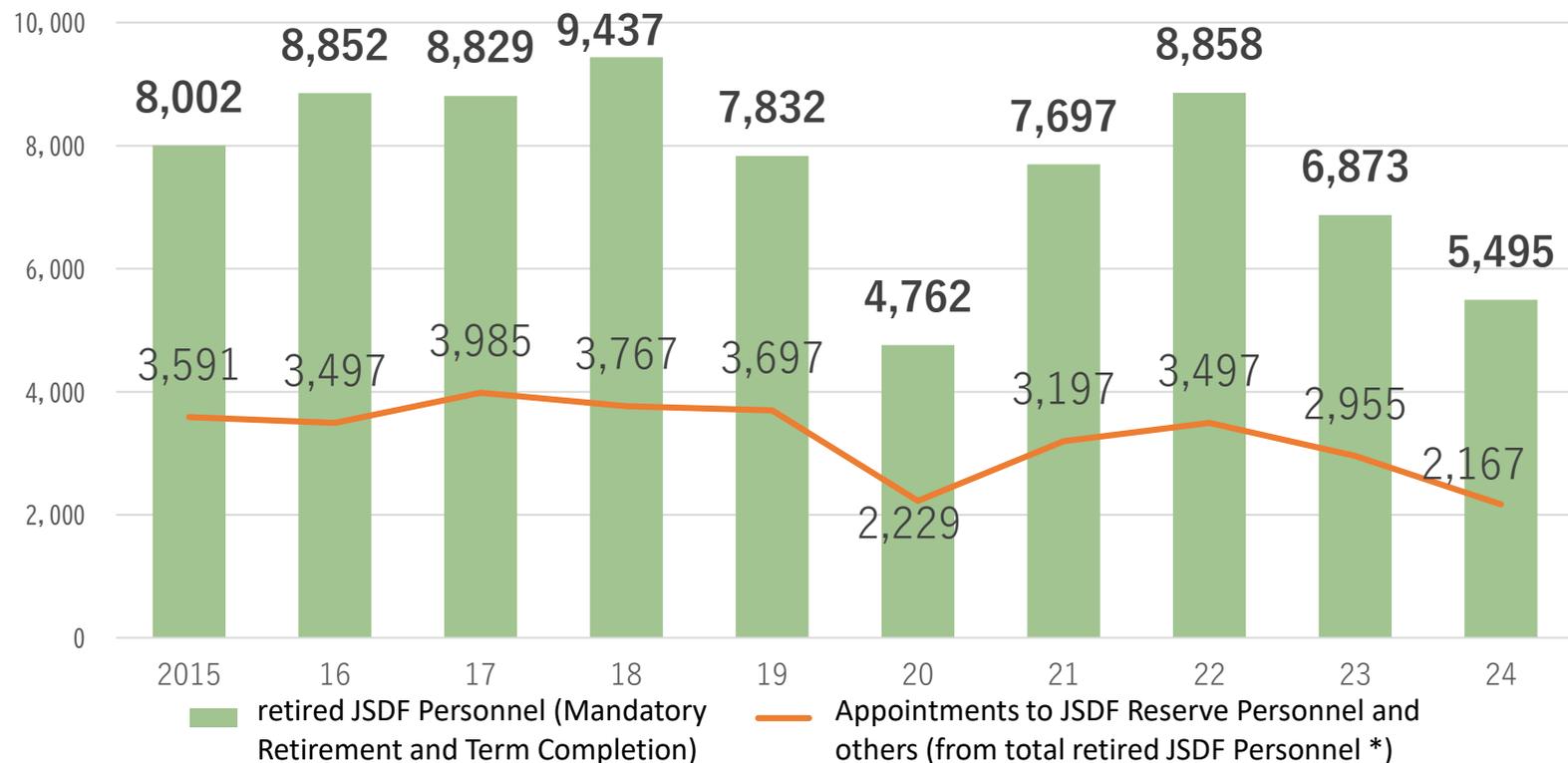
Current state of the JSDF's personnel base

4

Continued Low Fill Rates of JSDF Reserve Personnel and Others

- ✓ **Fill rates remain low, with JSDF Reserve Personnel and others at approximately 70% (around 32,000 personnel) and JSDF Ready Reserve Personnel at below 50% (around 3,900 personnel).**
- ✓ The primary source of JSDF Reserve Personnel and others is retired JSDF personnel, including those reaching mandatory retirement age and those completing their terms of service. However, the number of personnel appointed as JSDF Reserve Personnel and others upon retirement has remained at approximately 40% of the number of retired JSDF personnel.

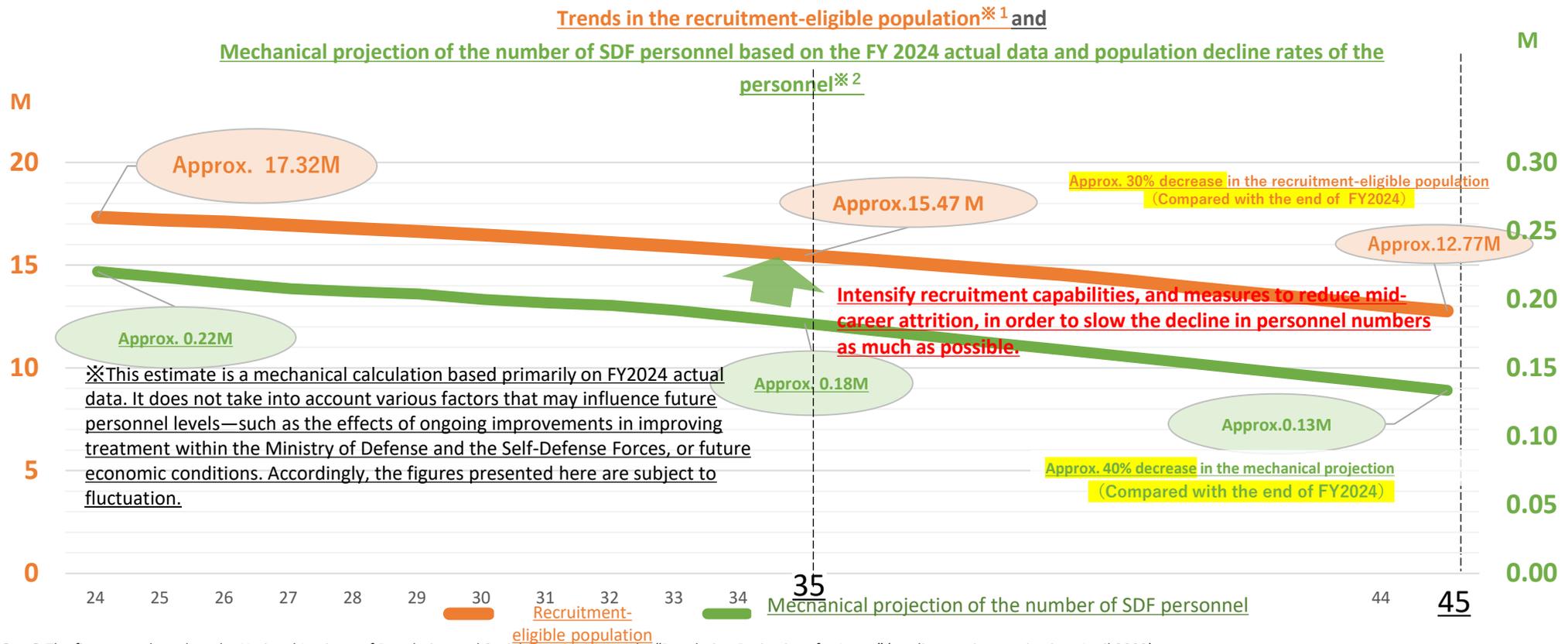
Trends in Retired JSDF Personnel (Mandatory Retirement and Term Completion) and Appointments to JSDF Reserve Personnel and others



* including mandatory retirement, term completion and mid-career resignation

2 Future directions for further consideration

- ✓ Population decline is an unavoidable reality for national security and defense as well. It is therefore essential to strengthen and transform Japan's defense capabilities on the premise of a shrinking population.
- ✓ Specifically:
 - ① **Intensify recruitment capabilities, and retention efforts including reducing mid-career attrition to secure as Actual Strength of Uniformed SDF Personnel as possible and enable each SDF personnel to fully realize their potential.**
 - **However, given the reality of population decline, measures to reinforce the human resource base alone will not be sufficient. It is necessary to ② Vigorously promote the introduction of unmanned assets and automation upgrades of existing assets, while taking operational requirements into account, ③ Develop an organizational structure that enables the Self-Defense Forces to generate military capability more efficiently and effectively, and ④ Expanding outsourcing etc. that contribute to further strengthening and transforming Japan's defense capabilities.**



【※1】 The figures are based on the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, "Population Projections for Japan" (medium-variant projection, April 2023).

【※2】 The following estimates are calculated mechanically based on the assumptions below.

- The number of personnel commissioned is defined as the total of new commissions and reappointments (post-retirement reappointments and reappointments of former SDF personnel).
 - New commissions from FY2025 onward are calculated by applying the population decline rate of the recruitment-eligible cohort (ages 18–32) to the number of commissions recorded in FY2024.
 - Reappointments from FY2025 onward (post-retirement reappointments and reappointments of former SDF personnel) are assumed to remain at the FY2024 level.
- The number of retirements is defined as the total of mandatory retirements, mid-career retirements, contract-completion retirements, and retirements of post-retirement reappointed personnel.
 - Mandatory retirements from FY2025 to FY2035 are estimated based on the current organizational structure (as of 1 September 2025). For FY2036–FY2045, the estimated number of mandatory retirements in FY2035 is used as a provisional value.
 - Mid-career retirements from FY2025 onward are calculated by applying the population decline rate of the recruitment-eligible cohort (ages 18–32) to the FY2024 actual figure.
 - Contract-completion retirements from FY2025 onward are calculated as follows
 - Estimate the number of personnel reaching contract completion by applying the population decline rate of the recruitment-eligible cohort (ages 18–32) to the three-year average (FY2022–FY2024) of personnel reaching contract completion
 - Multiply the number of personnel reaching contract completion in each fiscal year by the three-year average (FY2022–FY2024) contract-completion retirement rate. (The three-year average is used because the number of contract-completion candidates and retirees fluctuates by year.)
 - Retirements of post-retirement reappointed personnel from FY2025 onward are assumed to remain at the FY2024 level.
 - Population decline rates are based on the "Population Projection for Japan" (medium estimates in April 2023), National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

2

Future Directions for Changes (Summary)

Based on the assumption of a declining population, we will comprehensively examine the following issues.

1

To secure as many Actual Strength of Uniformed SDF Personnel as possible, we will further expand the pool of eligible candidates for the Self-Defense Forces and enhance the appeal of the profession, while also creating an environment in which each SDF personnel can fully demonstrate their abilities.

➤ **Becoming an organization that places greater value on its people**

- For the first time since the founding of the Self-Defense Forces, Improving treatment through a revision of the salary schedule for SDF personnel.
- Reform of organizational culture (Reduction of Mid-Career retirements · Creation of an organization in which all SDF personnel are highly engaged)
- Enhancing the social status of SDF personnel.
- Considering systems reform that address social shifts in work attitudes-career autonomy, local orientation, work-life balance, and the growing prevalence of senior employment
- Examining systems to secure a larger number of SDF Reserve Personnel and others.
- Outsourcing recruitment activities.

2

While taking operational frameworks into account, we will vigorously promote the introduction of unmanned assets and the thorough unmanning and automation upgrades of existing assets.

3

The organizational structure required for the Self-Defense forces to generate combat power more efficiently and effectively.

4

Expanding outsourcing, strengthening whole-of-government efforts, and the national government will also promote cooperation with local governments and private entities.