

Labor Force Statistics on Older Americans, 2012

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The labor market strengthened considerably in 2012. According to household survey data released in January by the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), the economy added 2.4 million jobs during the year and the unemployment rate fell significantly. Labor market outcomes improved for both younger and older workers. Older workers continued to fare better than their younger counterparts, although older unemployed adults took longer to find work.

This brief provides annual and monthly labor force statistics on older Americans, a growing segment of the workforce. Drawing on data from the BLS's Current Population Survey, it shows labor force participation rates (the share of the noninstitutionalized civilian population that is employed or looking for work), unemployment rates (the share of the labor force that is on layoff or out of work but looking for work), employment-to-population ratios (the share of the noninstitutionalized civilian population that is employed), and the share of unemployed workers who have been out of work for more than six months. Outcomes are generally reported for men and women ages 55 and older and 62 and older, with breakdowns at ages 62 to 64, 65 to 69, and 70 and older, and compared with those at younger ages.

Men and Women

- The labor force participation rate at ages 55 and older rose three-tenths of a point last year to 40.5 percent. It has not changed much since 2009 but exceeds its 2007 level—when the Great Recession began—by nearly 2 points. Participation rates increased even more rapidly over the past five years for those ages 62 and older. However, participation fell in 2012 for Americans ages 16 and older, continuing a trend since 2007. This overall decline resulted partly from population aging, as many baby boomers retired from the labor force over the past five years. However, many prime-age workers stopped looking for jobs and dropped out of the labor force because they could not find employment, which is reflected in the 1.4 percentage point decline in participation rates at ages 25 to 54 between 2007 and 2012.
- The average monthly unemployment rate at ages 55 and older fell 0.6 points in 2012, to 6.0 percent, the steepest decline since the recession began. The overall average monthly unemployment rate fell to 8.1 percent, the lowest rate since 2008. The unemployment rate also declined substantially in 2012 for workers ages 62 and older.
- The employment-to-population ratio is arguably the single most important labor force indicator, showing the share of Americans who are working. The average annual ratio increased—to 38.4 percent—for adults ages 55 and older in 2012. It remained higher last year than in 2007, reflecting strong growth in labor force participation for older adults since the Great Recession began. The annual employment-to-population ratio rose two-tenths of a point last year at ages 16 and older, the first increase since the recession began, but remained substantially below the 2007 average.
- In December 2012, 51.3 percent of unemployed men and women ages 55 to 64 and 40.9 percent of those ages 65 and older had been out of work for more than six months. The corresponding figure for those ages 25 to 54 was 41.8 percent.

Men

- The labor force participation rate for men ages 55 and older increased to 46.8 percent in 2012. It has not changed much since 2009, but increased rapidly between 2000 and 2009. Participation rates at ages 62 to 64 increased between 2007 and 2009, fell in 2010 and 2011, and increased in 2012. Participation rates for men ages 62 and older were higher in 2012 than in 2007, when the recession began. All educational groups experienced this growth.
- The average monthly unemployment rate for men ages 55 and older fell 0.7 points last year, to 6.3 percent, well below the 2010 average of 7.7 percent. Unemployment fell in 2012 for men ages 62 to 64, 65 to 69, and 70 and older, but remained well above 2007 levels. At ages 62 and older, the unemployment rate for men who completed four or more years of college was much lower than for men with less education.
- The employment-to-population ratio increased 0.7 points in 2012 for men ages 55 and older, inching above its 2007 average. For men ages 62 to 64, it increased between 2007 and 2009, fell in 2010 and 2011, and rebounded in 2012. The employment-to-population ratio for men ages 62 and older increased steadily with education.
- In December 2012, 48.9 percent of unemployed men ages 55 to 64 and 35.3 percent of those ages 65 and older had been out of work for more than six months.

Women

- The average monthly labor force participation rate for women ages 55 and older remained at 35.1 percent in 2012 for the third straight year. It rose slightly in 2009, after increasing rapidly between 2000 and 2009. Participation rates at ages 62 to 64 increased between 2007 and 2010 but fell in 2011 and 2012. Participation rates for women ages 62 and older were higher in 2012 than in 2007, when the recession began. All educational groups experienced this growth.
- The unemployment rate for women ages 55 and older fell 0.5 points last year, to 5.7 percent. Unemployment fell in 2012 for women ages 62 to 64 and 70 and older, but remained constant for women ages 65 to 69. Unemployment rates were much higher for women ages 62 and older with no more than a high school diploma than for their counterparts with higher education.
- The employment-to-population ratio for women ages 55 and older rose 0.2 points in 2012, to 33.1 percent. It remains a bit higher than its 2007 average. For women ages 62 to 64, it increased between 2007 and 2010, but fell in 2011 and 2012. The employment-to-population ratio for women ages 62 and older increased steadily with education.
- In December 2012, 54.4 percent of unemployed women ages 55 to 64 and 48.2 percent of those ages 65 and older had been out of work for more than six months.

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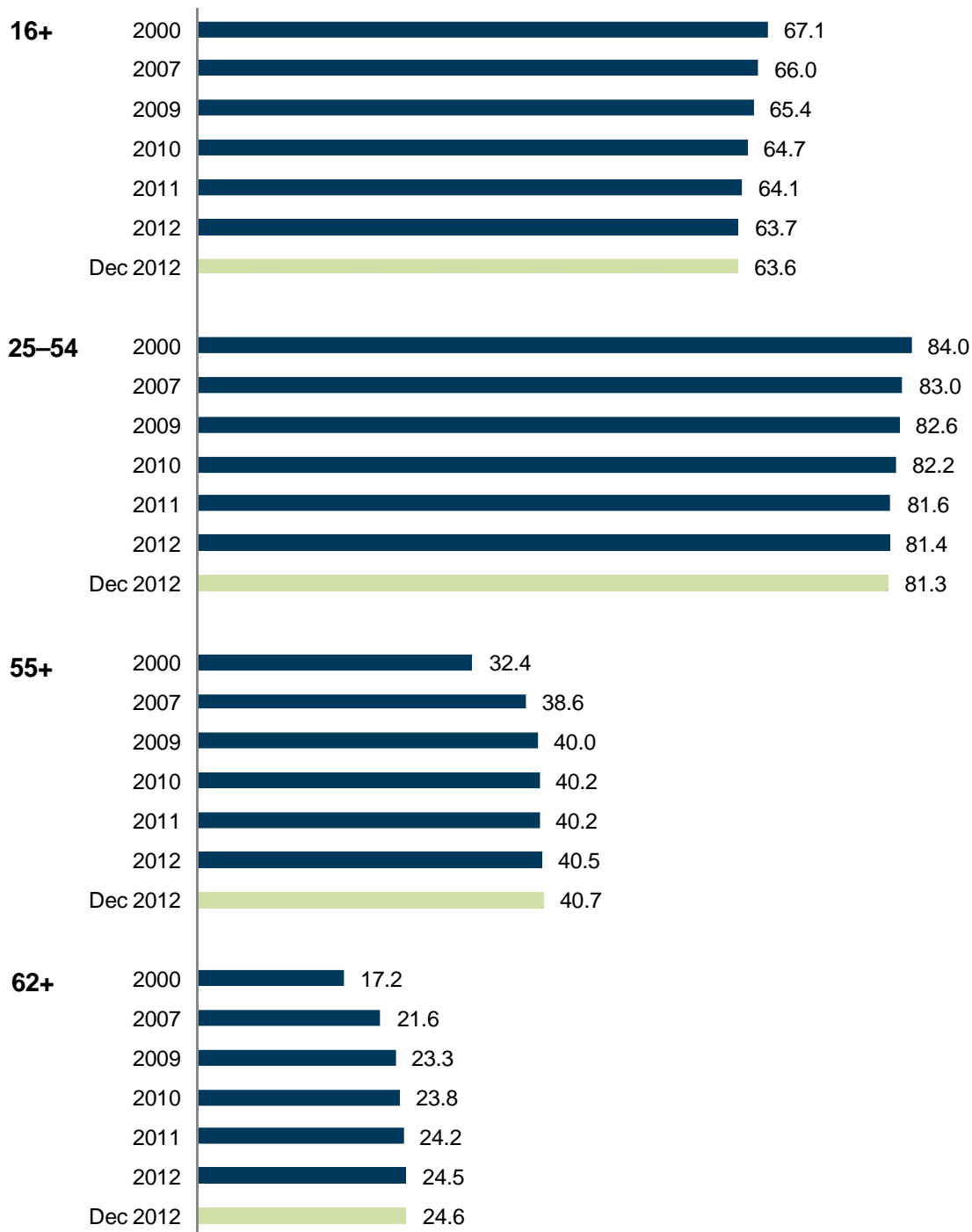
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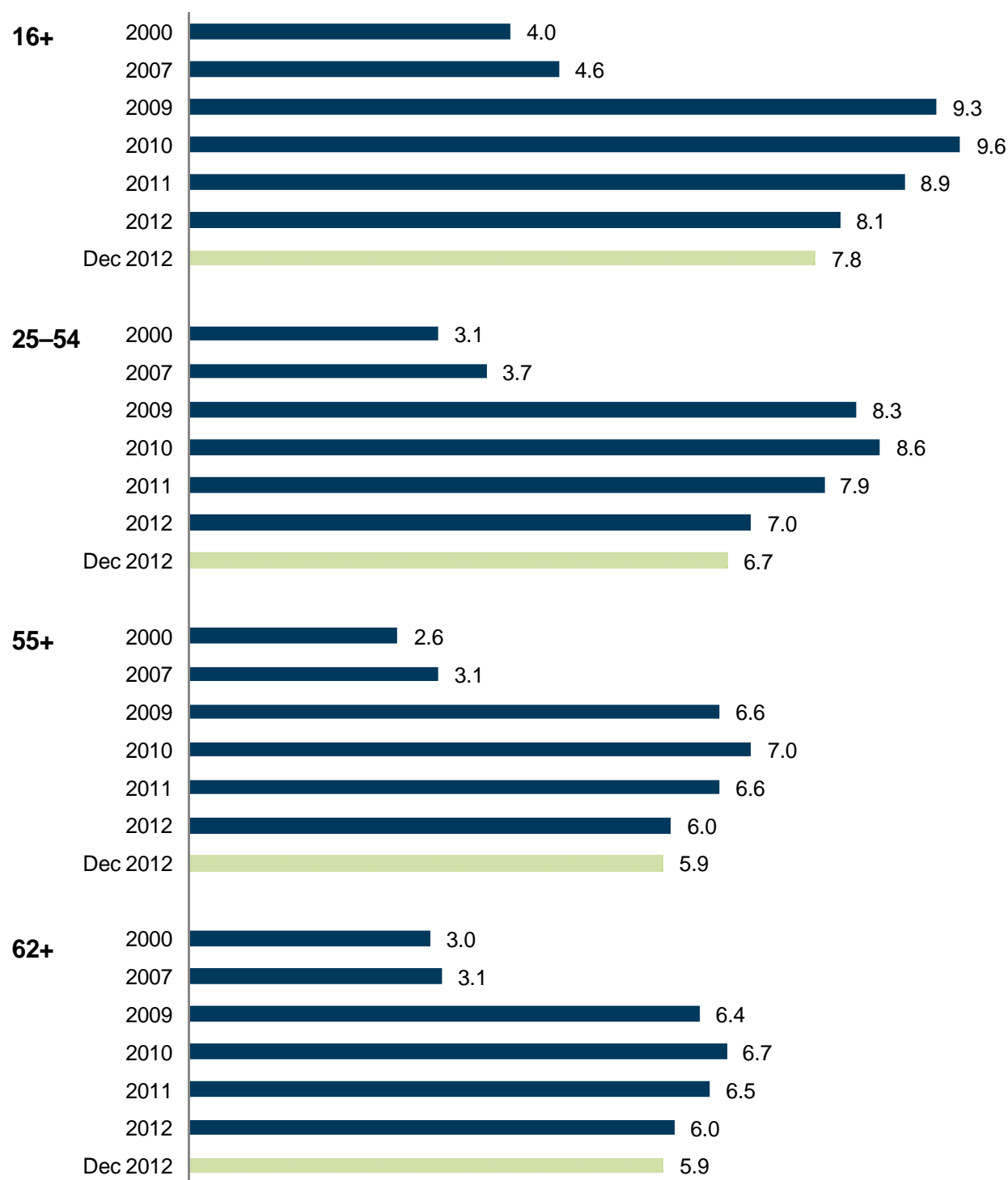
Figure 1. Labor Force Participation Rates by Year and Age, Persons Ages 16 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Persons are considered to be in the labor force if they are working, on layoff, or looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted, except for ages 62+.

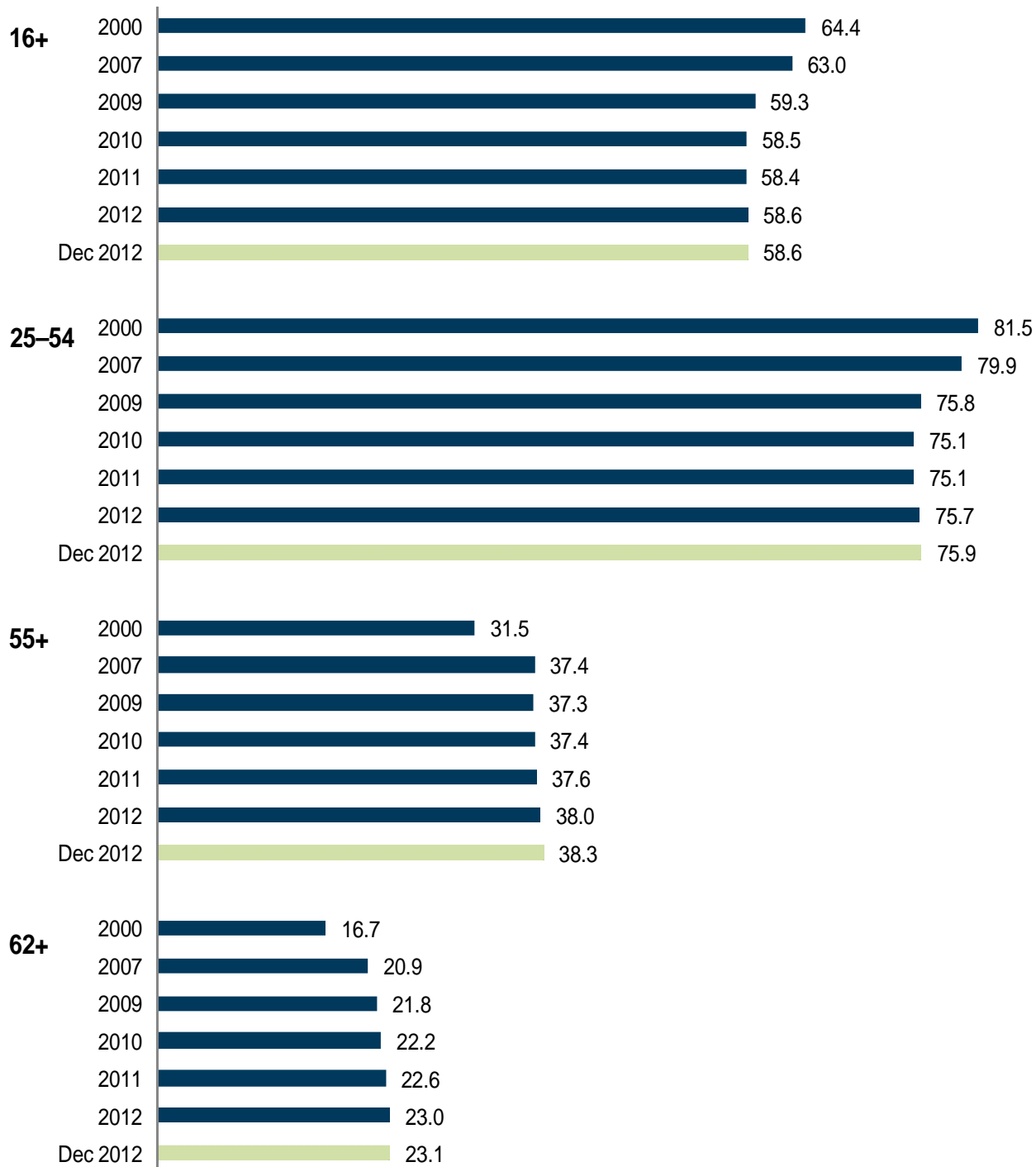
Figure 2. Unemployment Rates by Year and Age, Persons Ages 16 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is on layoff or not working but looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted, except for ages 62+.

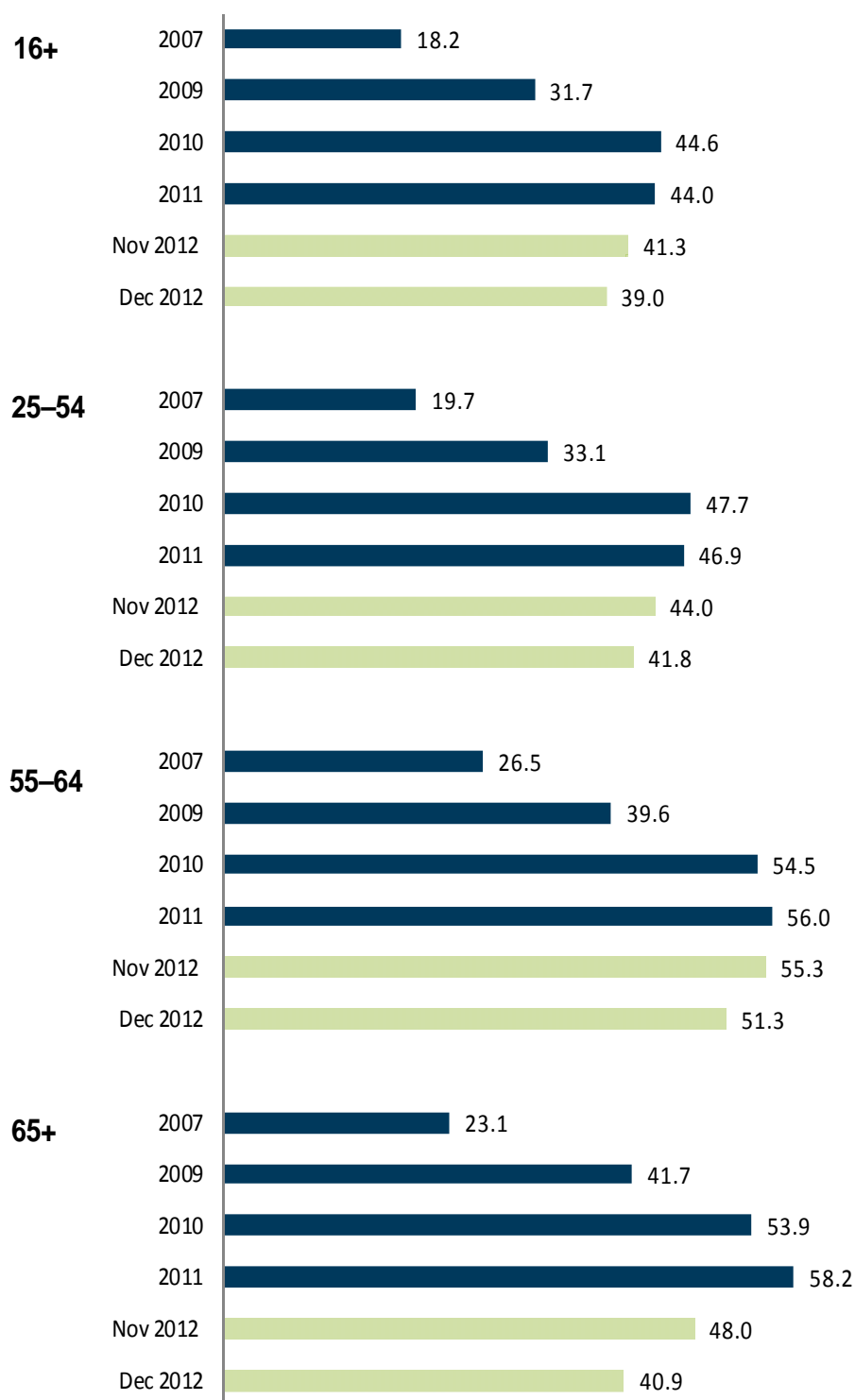
Figure 3. Employment-to-Population Ratios by Year and Age, Persons Ages 16 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted, except for ages 62+.

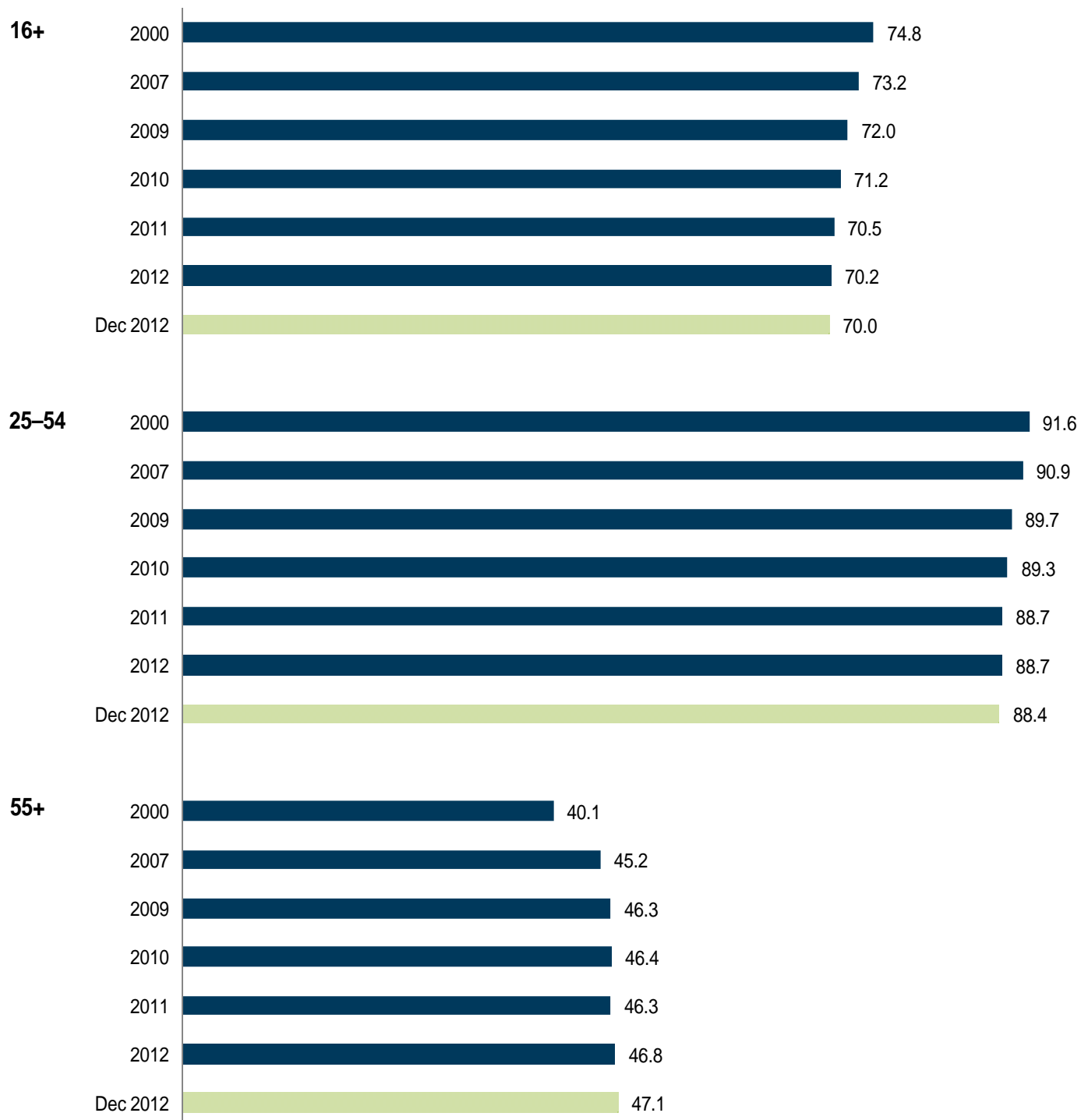
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

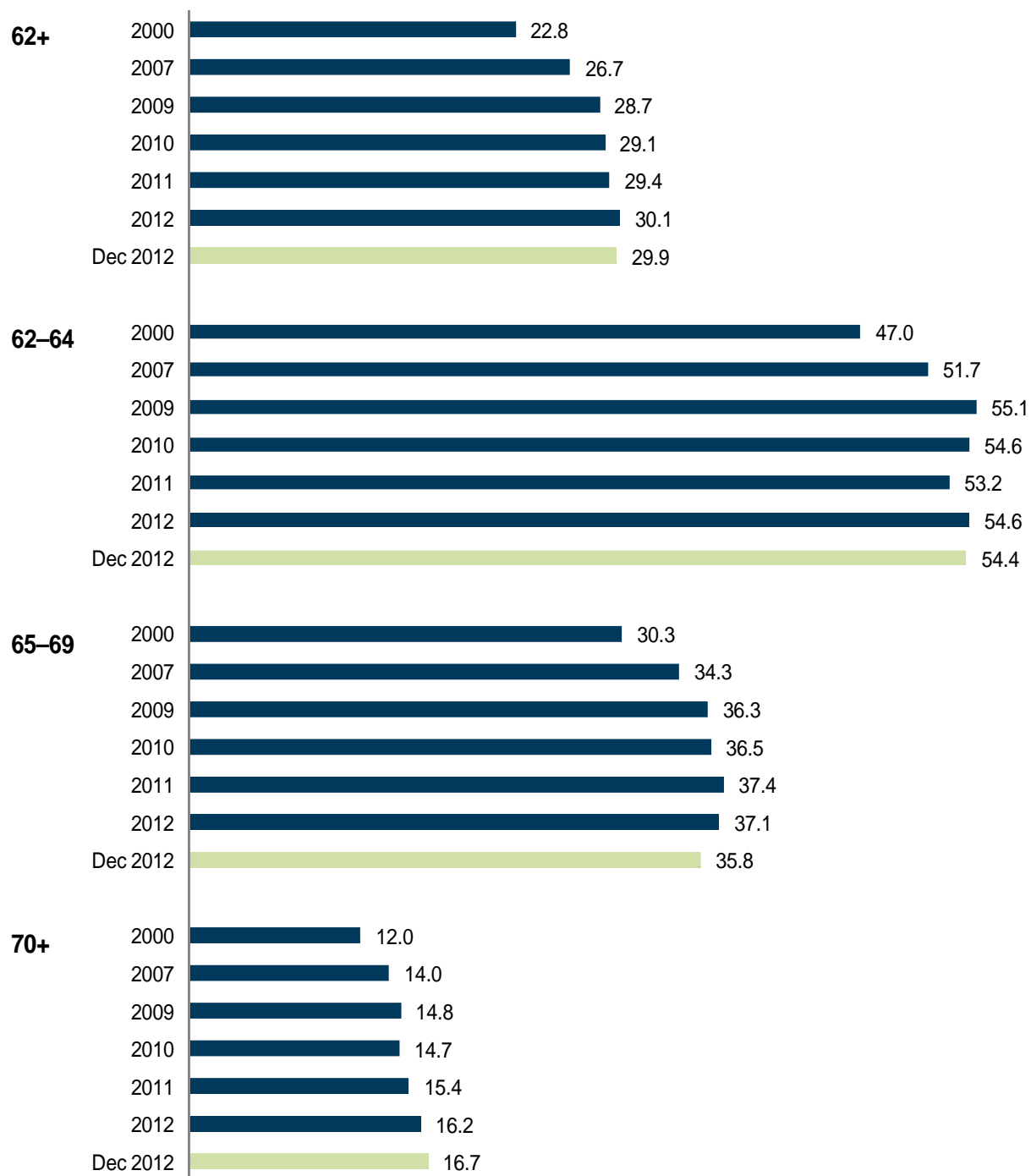
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Persons are considered to be in the labor force if they are working, on layoff, or looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted.

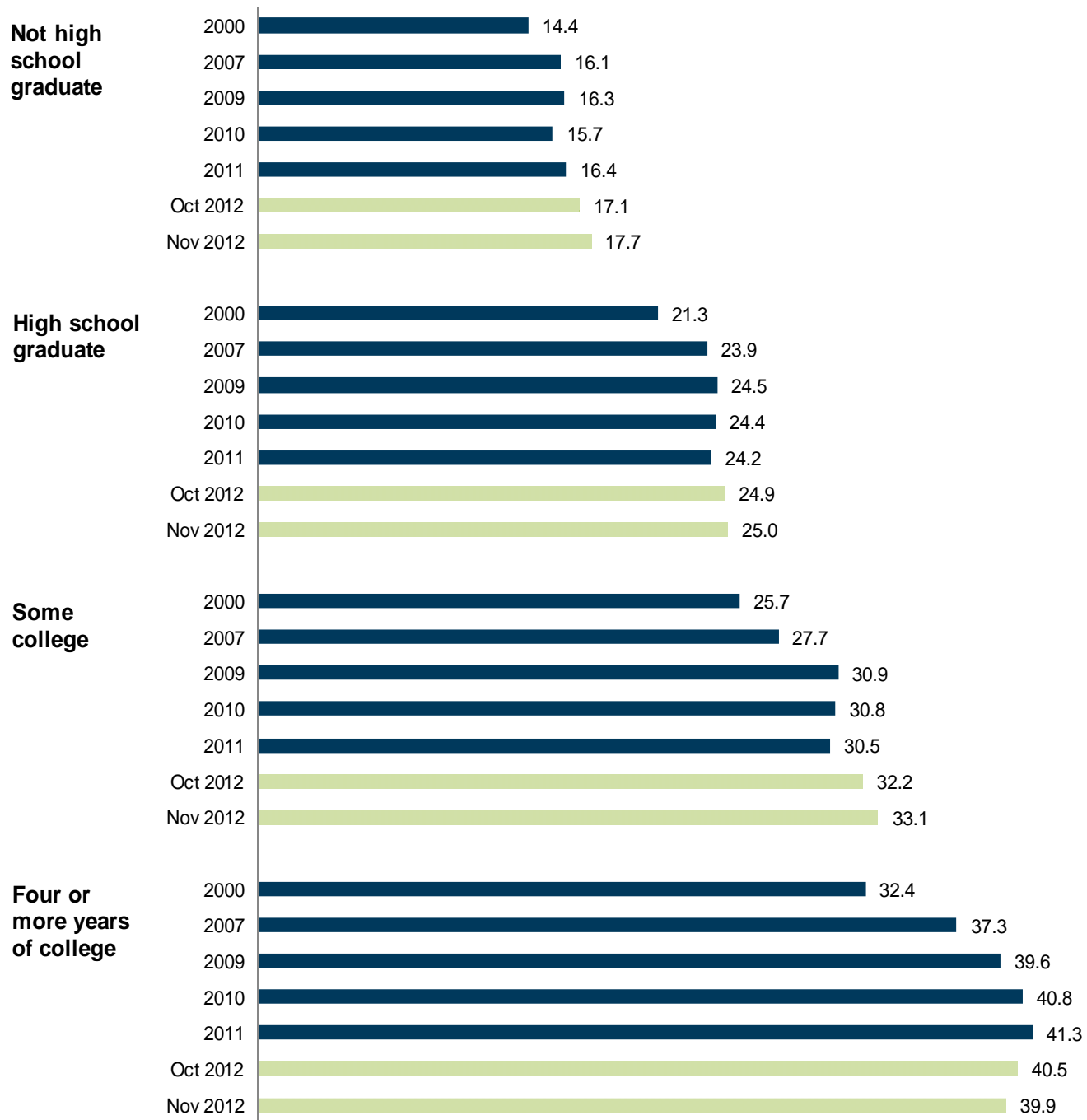
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Persons are considered to be in the labor force if they are working, on layoff, or looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

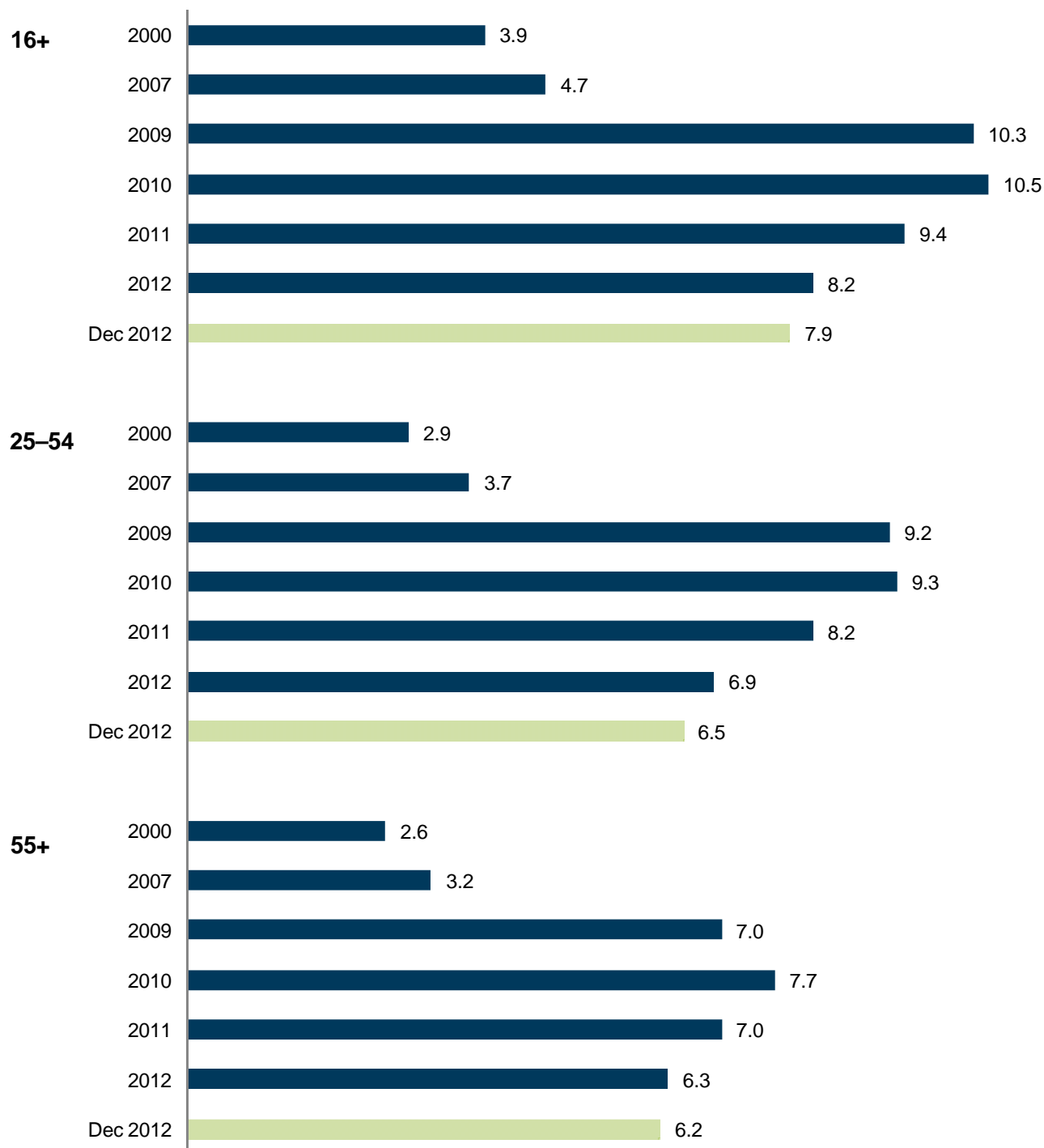
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Persons are considered to be in the labor force if they are working, on layoff, or looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

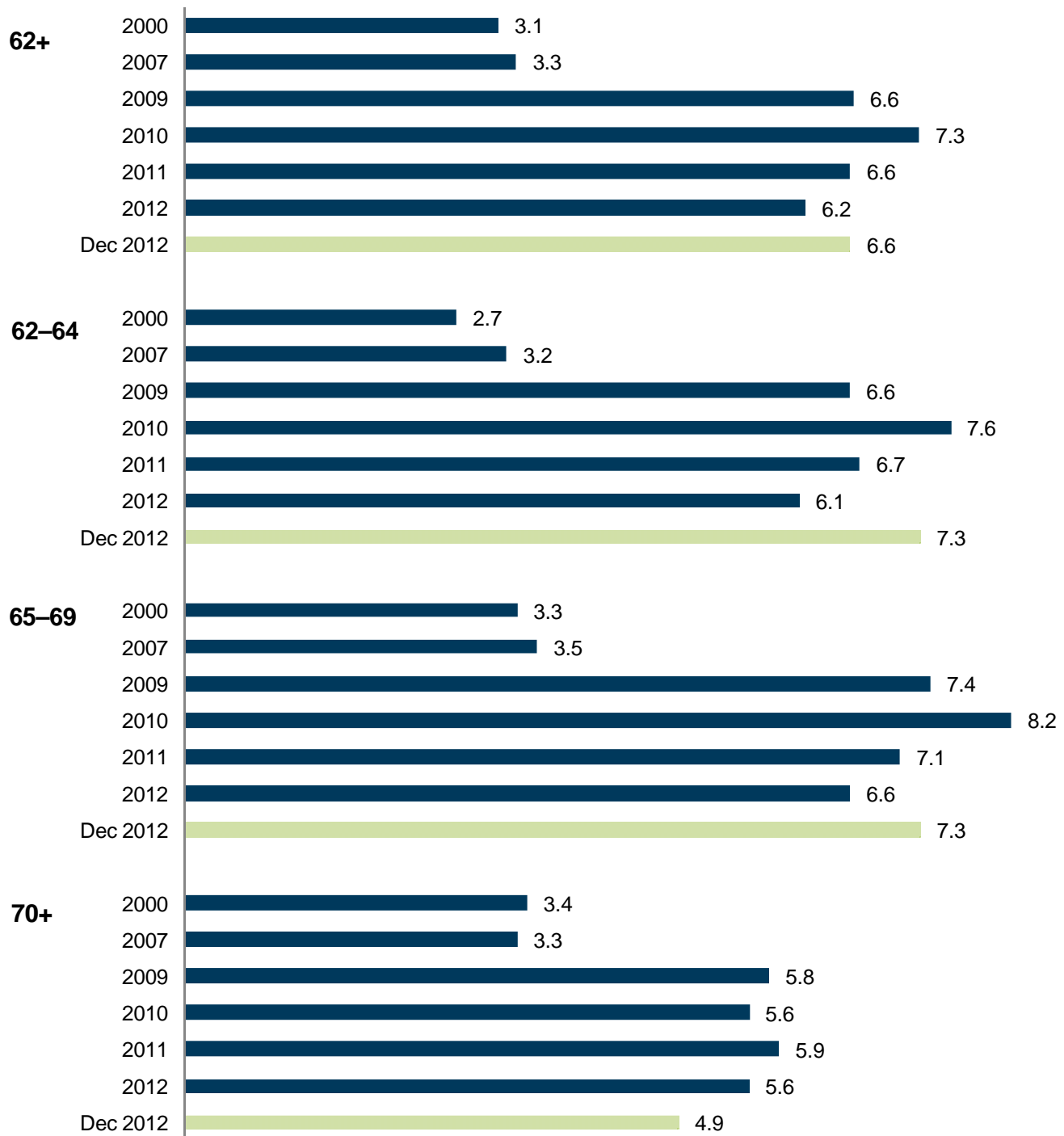
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is on layoff or not working but looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted.

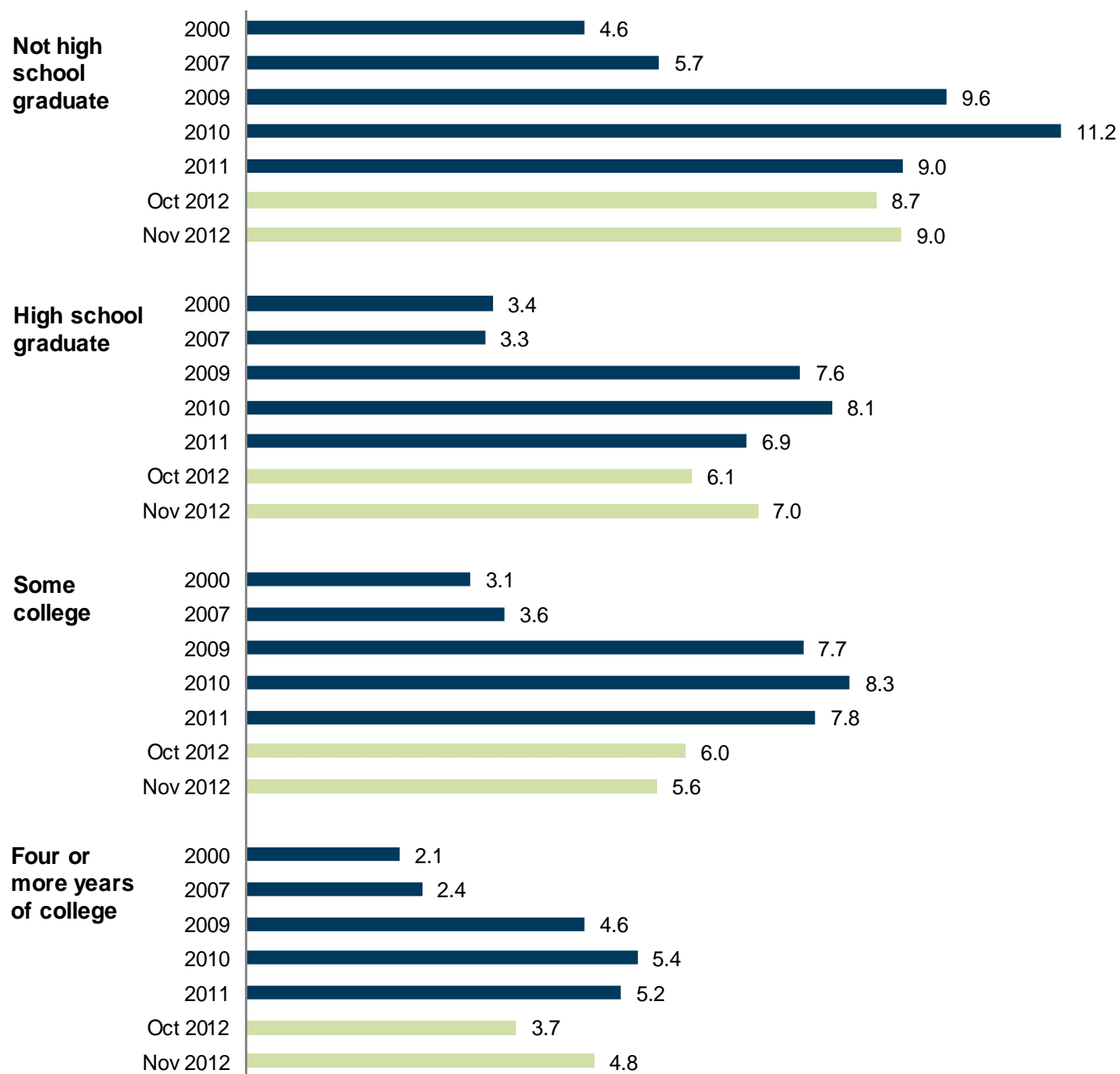
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is on layoff or not working but looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

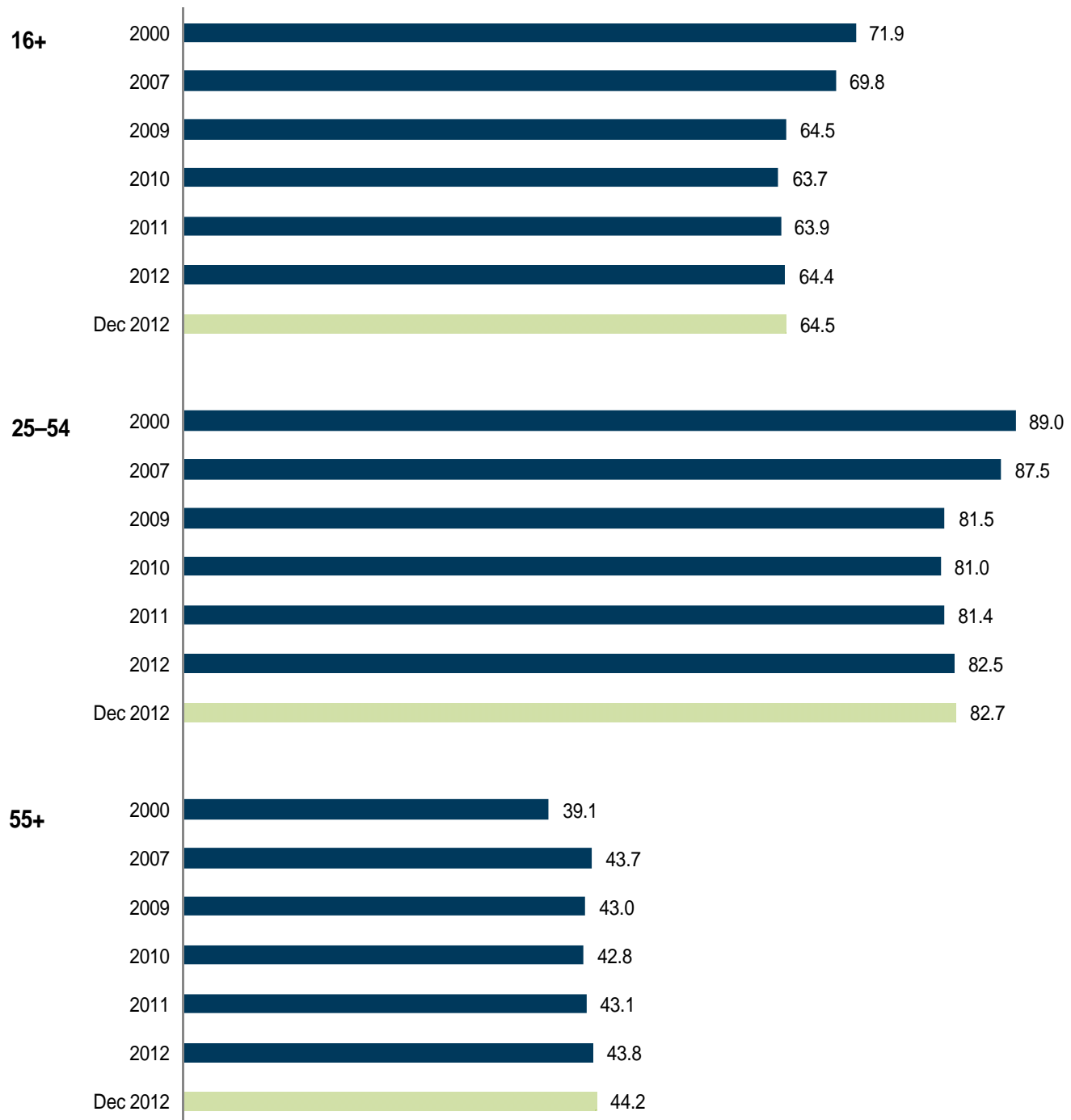
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is on layoff or not working but looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

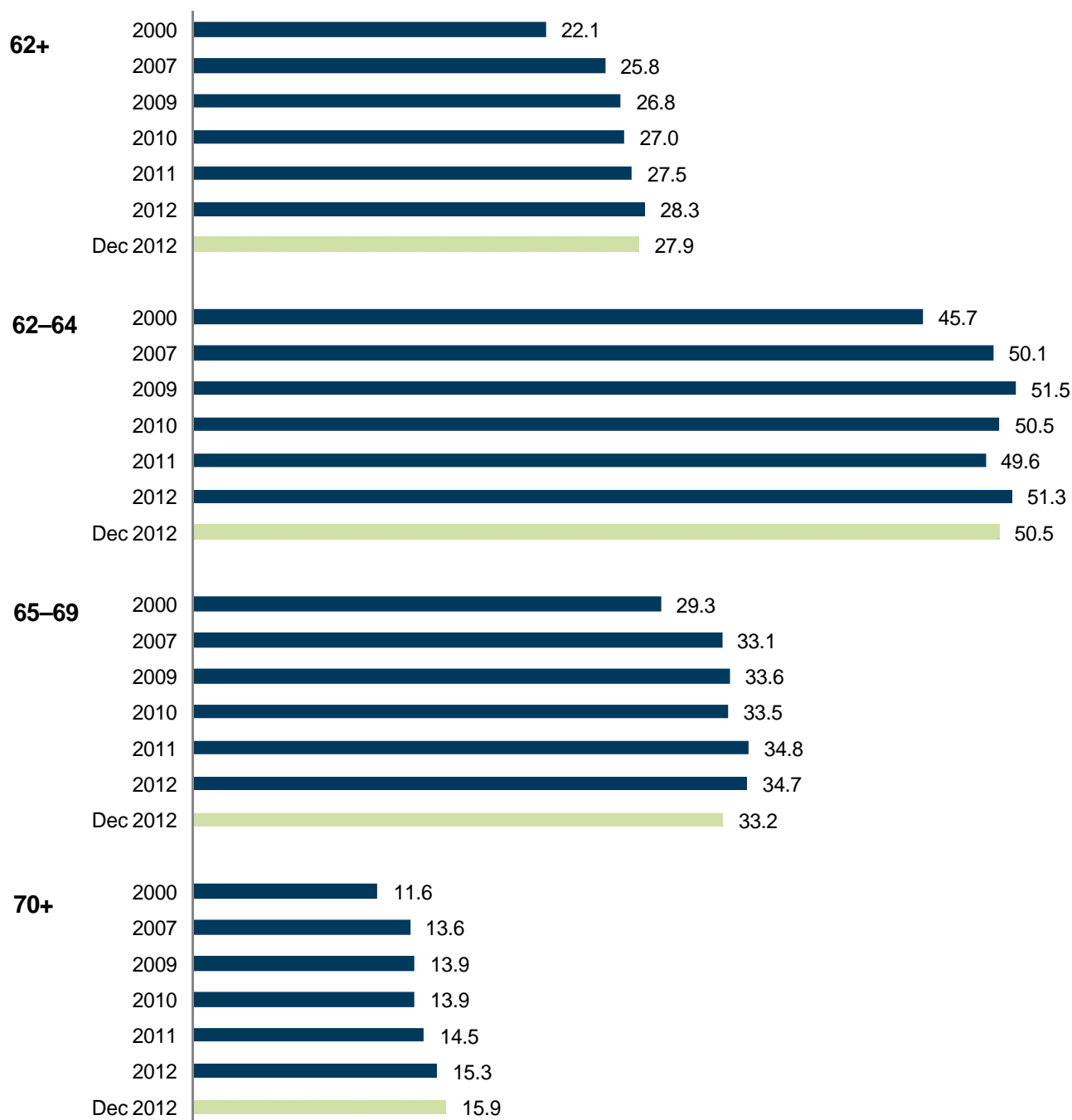
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted.

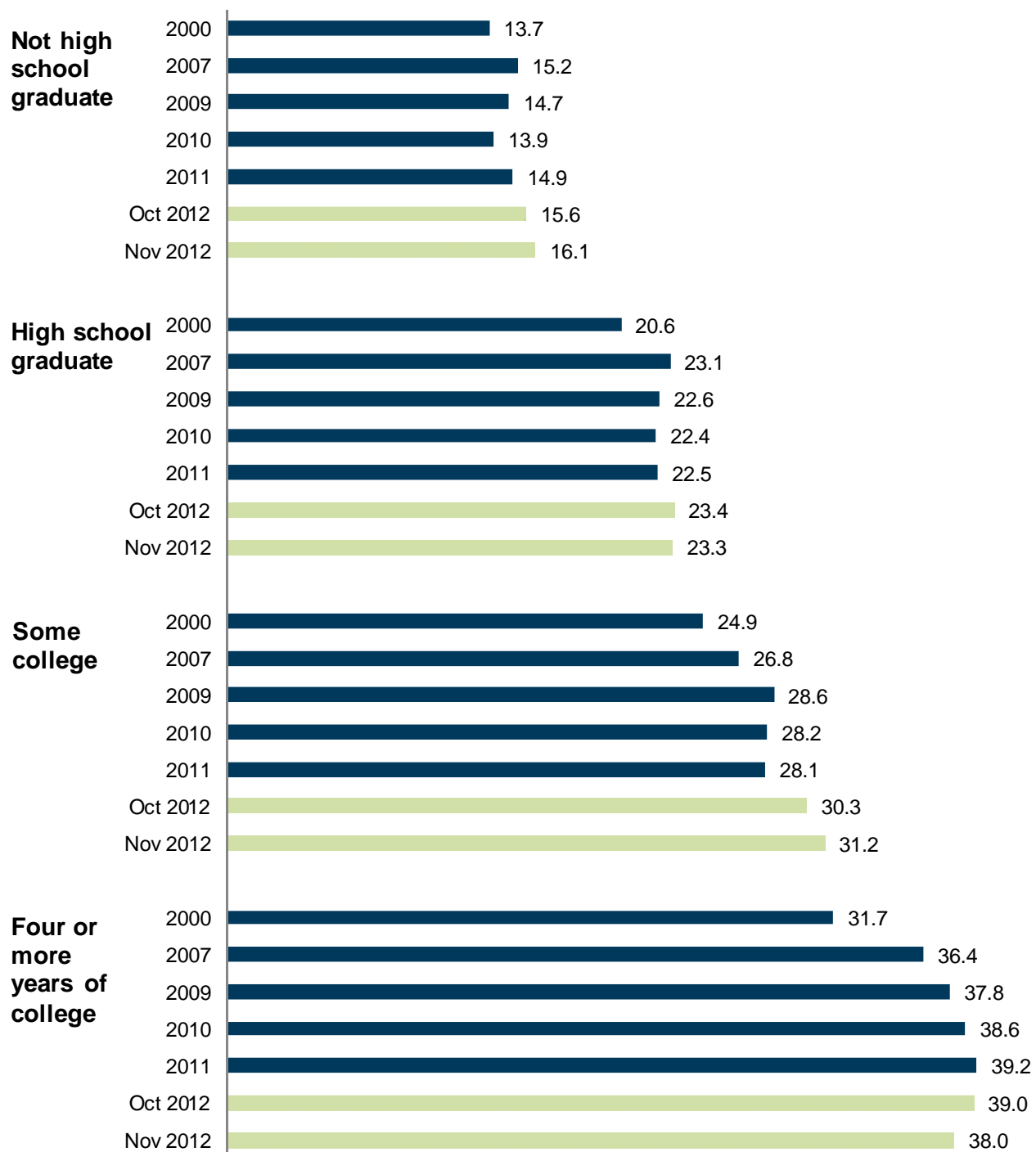
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

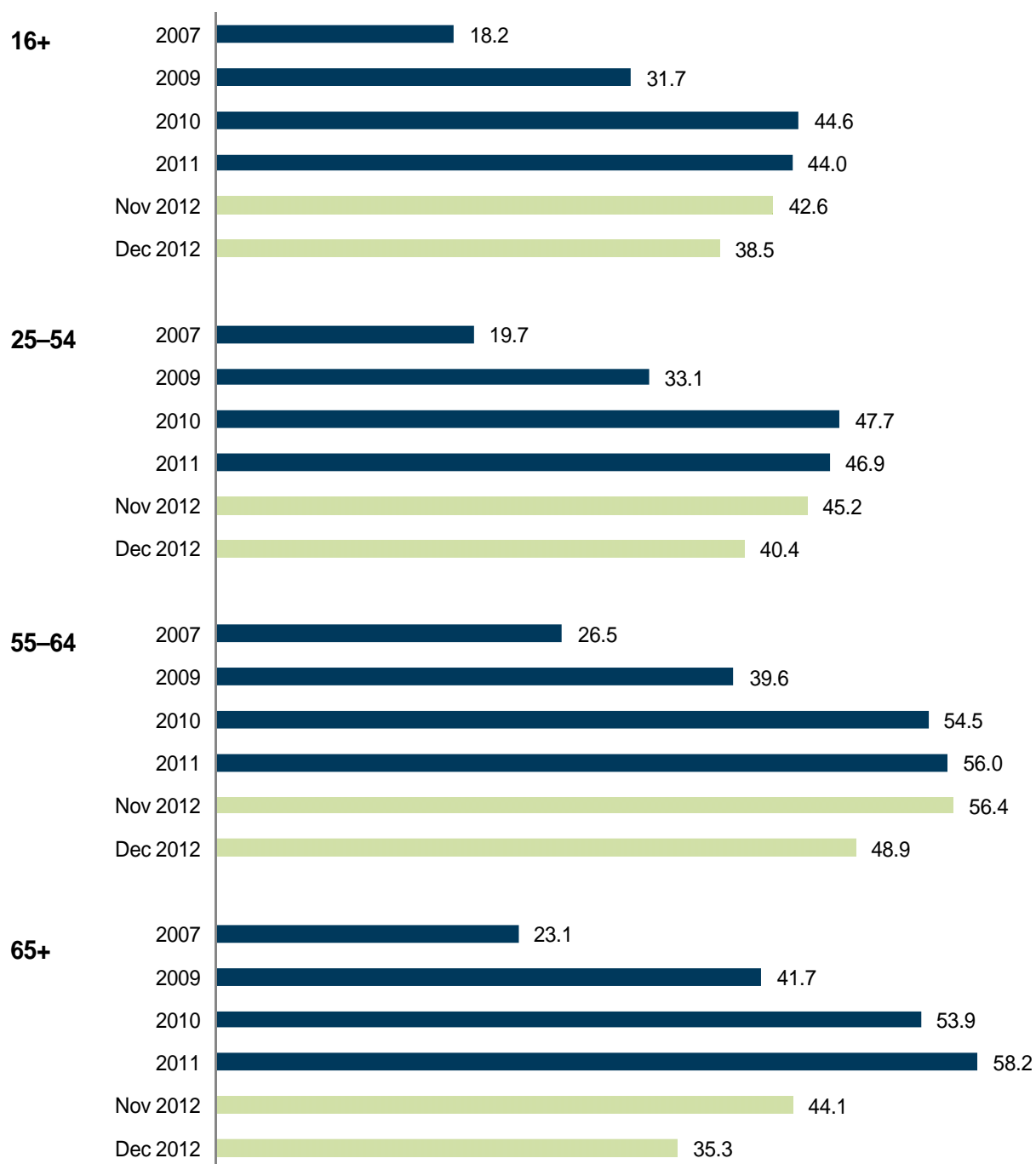
Figure 13. Employment-to-Population Ratios by Year and Education, Men Ages 62 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

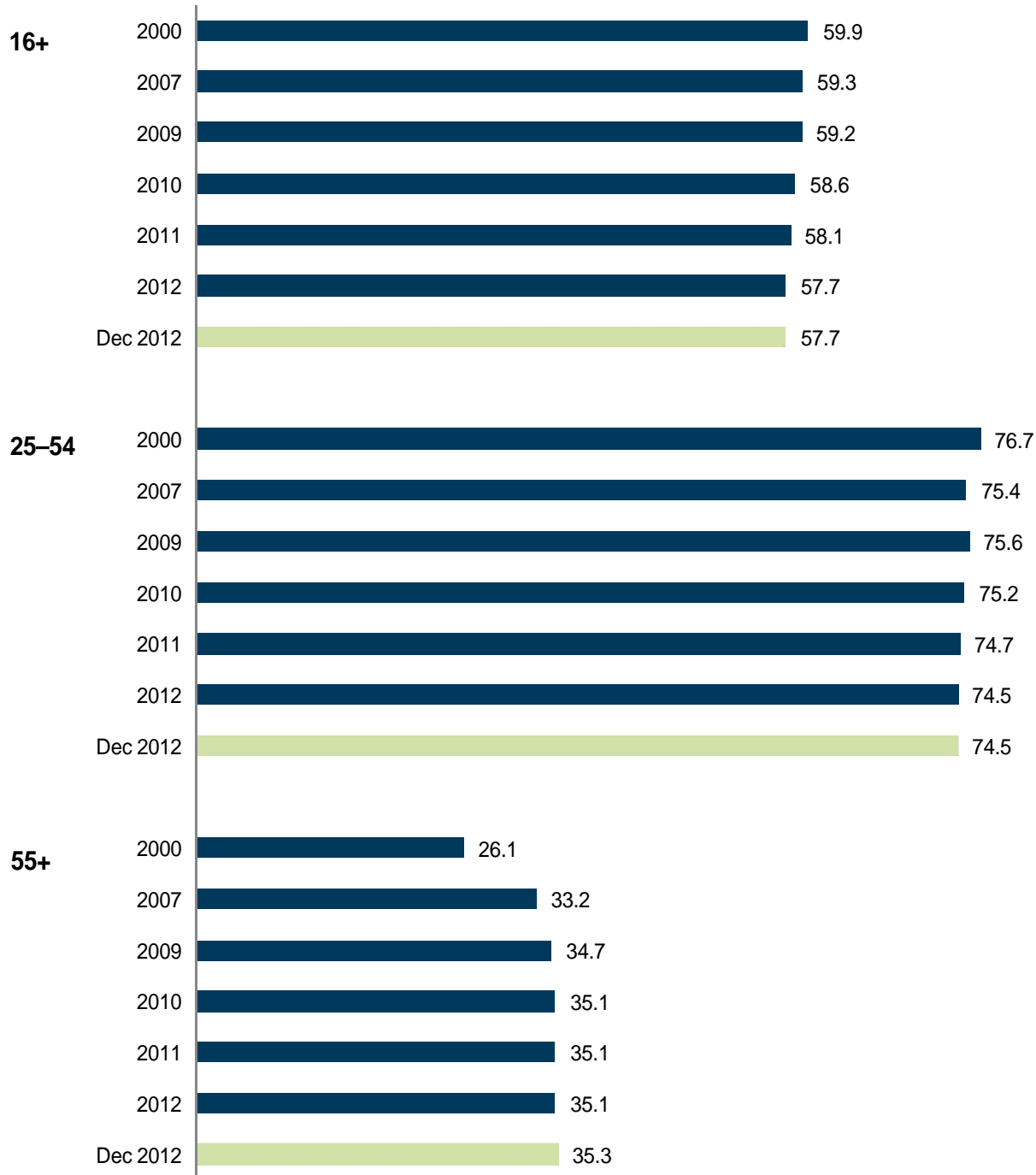
Figure 14. Unemployed Men Out of Work for More Than Six Months by Age and Year (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

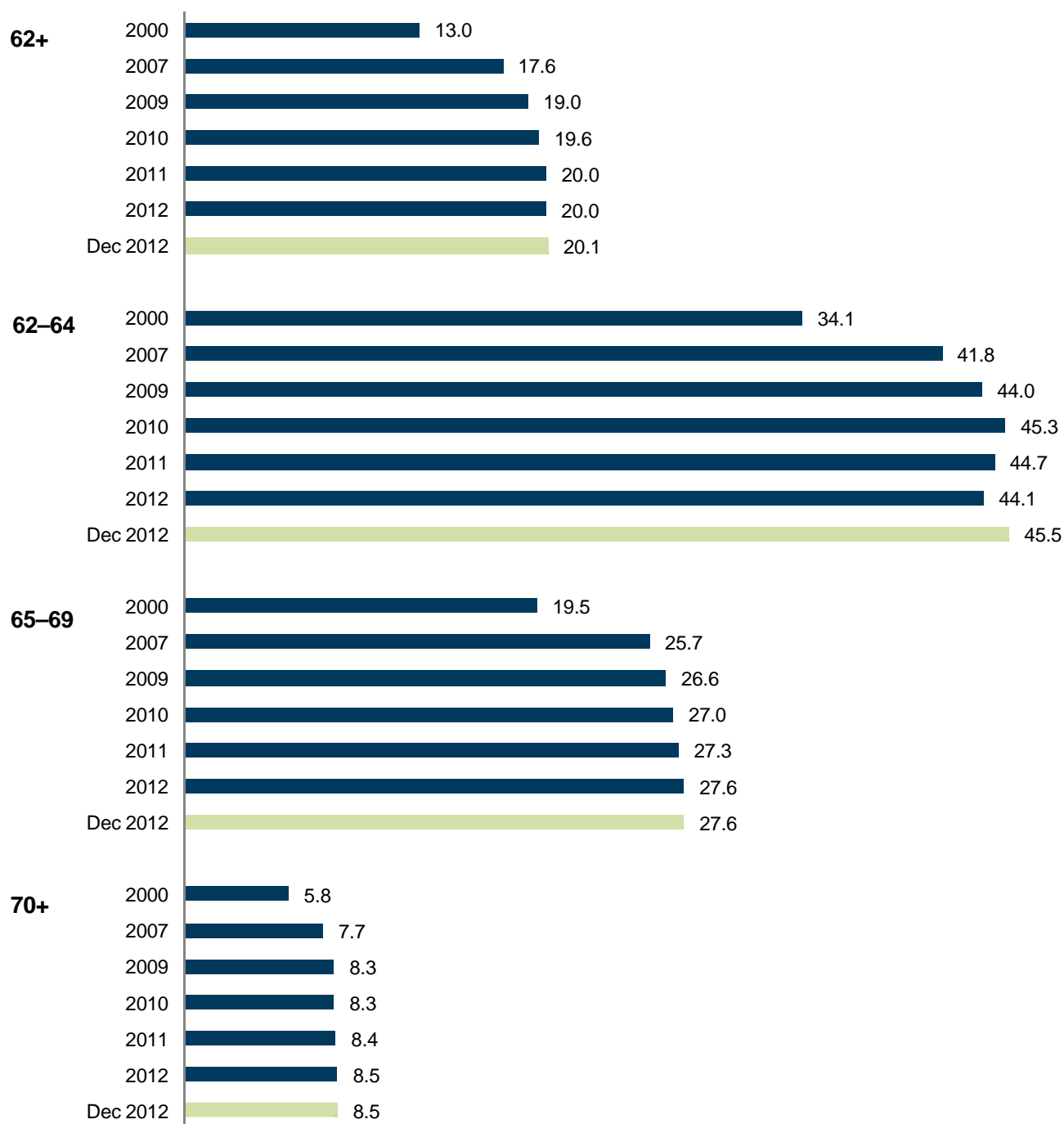
Figure 15. Labor Force Participation Rates by Year and Age, Women Ages 16 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Persons are considered to be in the labor force if they are working, on layoff, or looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted, except for ages 55 and older.

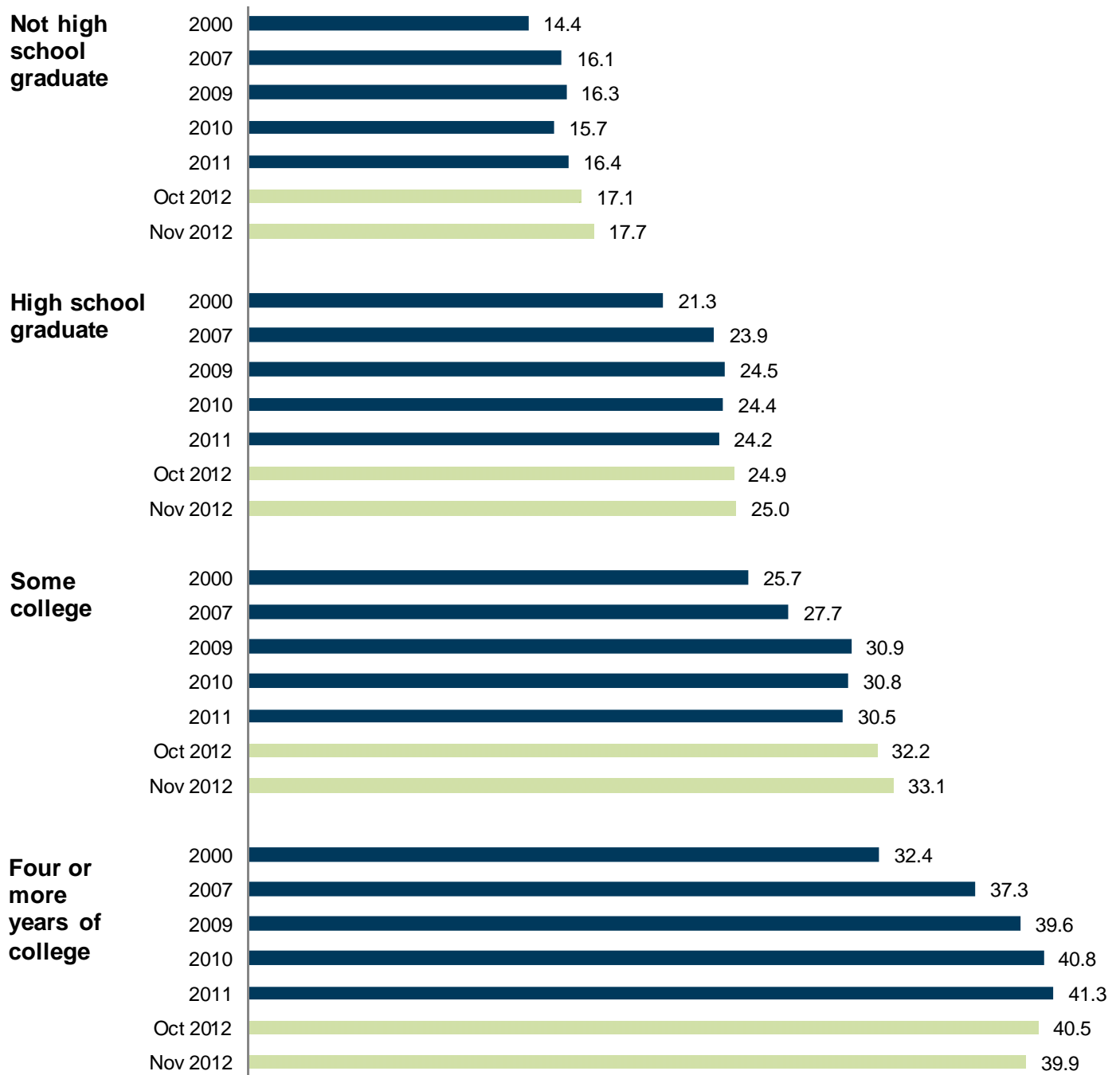
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Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

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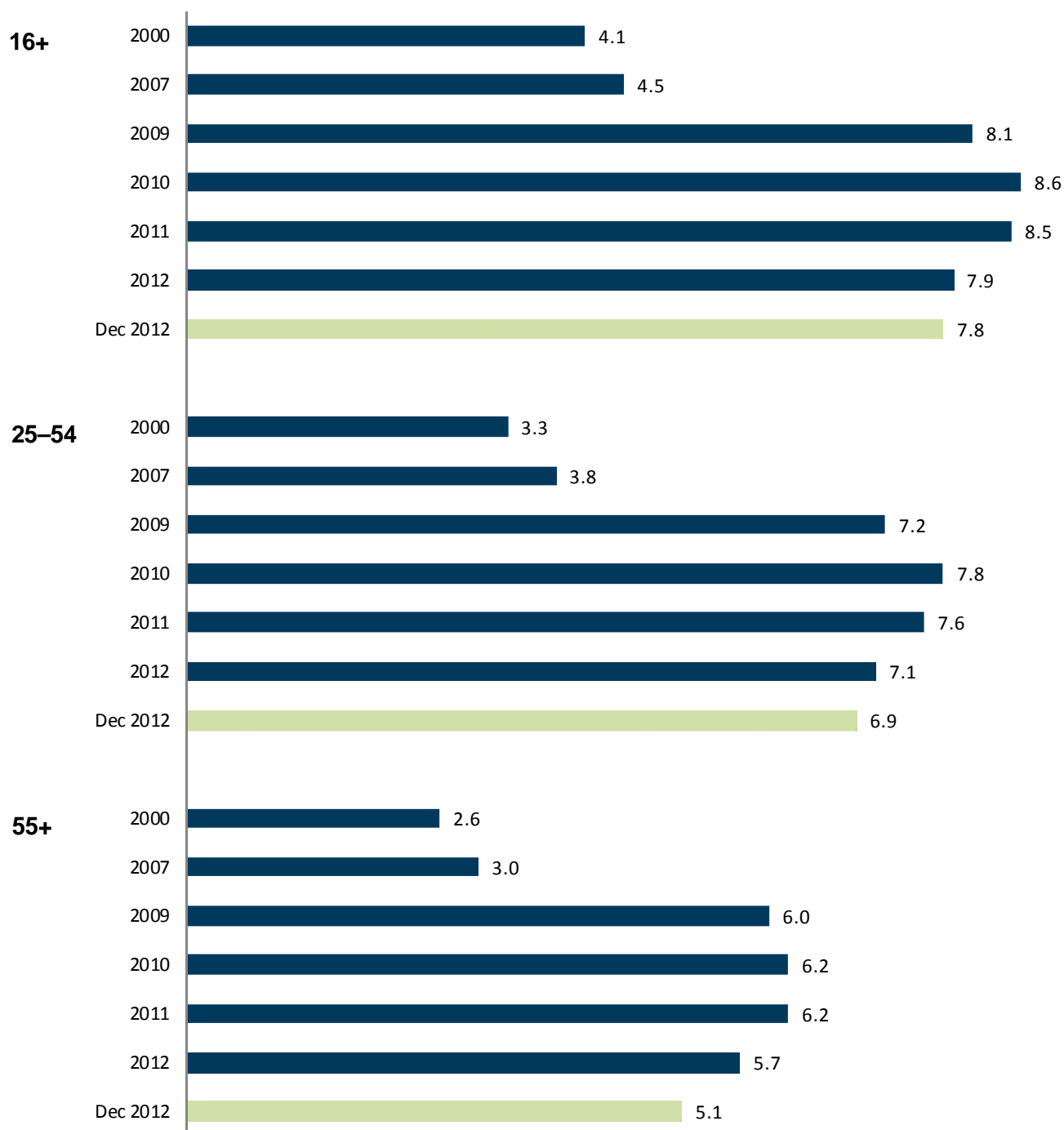
Figure 17. Labor Force Participation Rates by Year and Education, Women Ages 62 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

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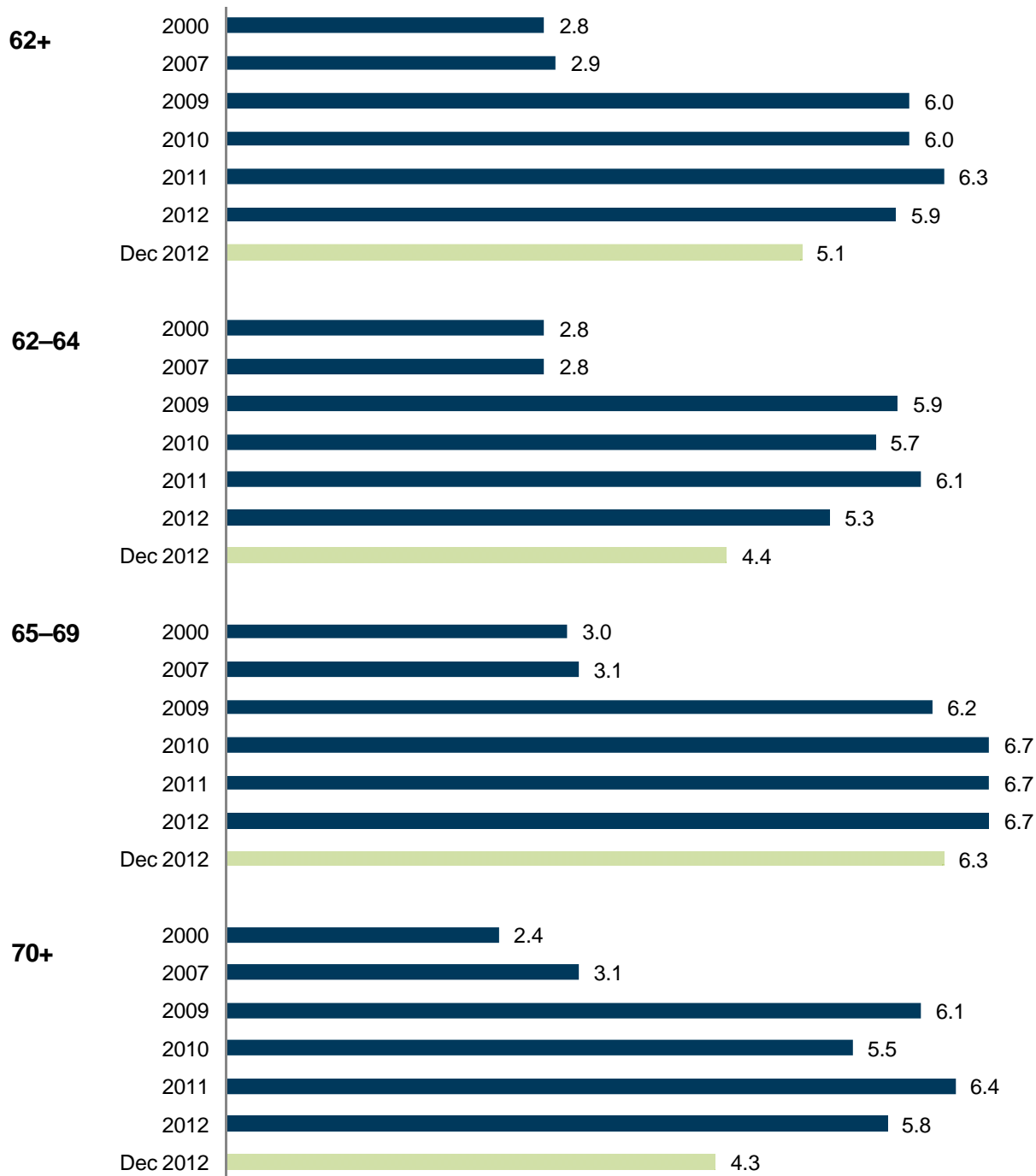
Figure 18. Unemployment Rates by Year and Age, Women Ages 16 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is on layoff or not working but looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted, except for ages 55 and older.

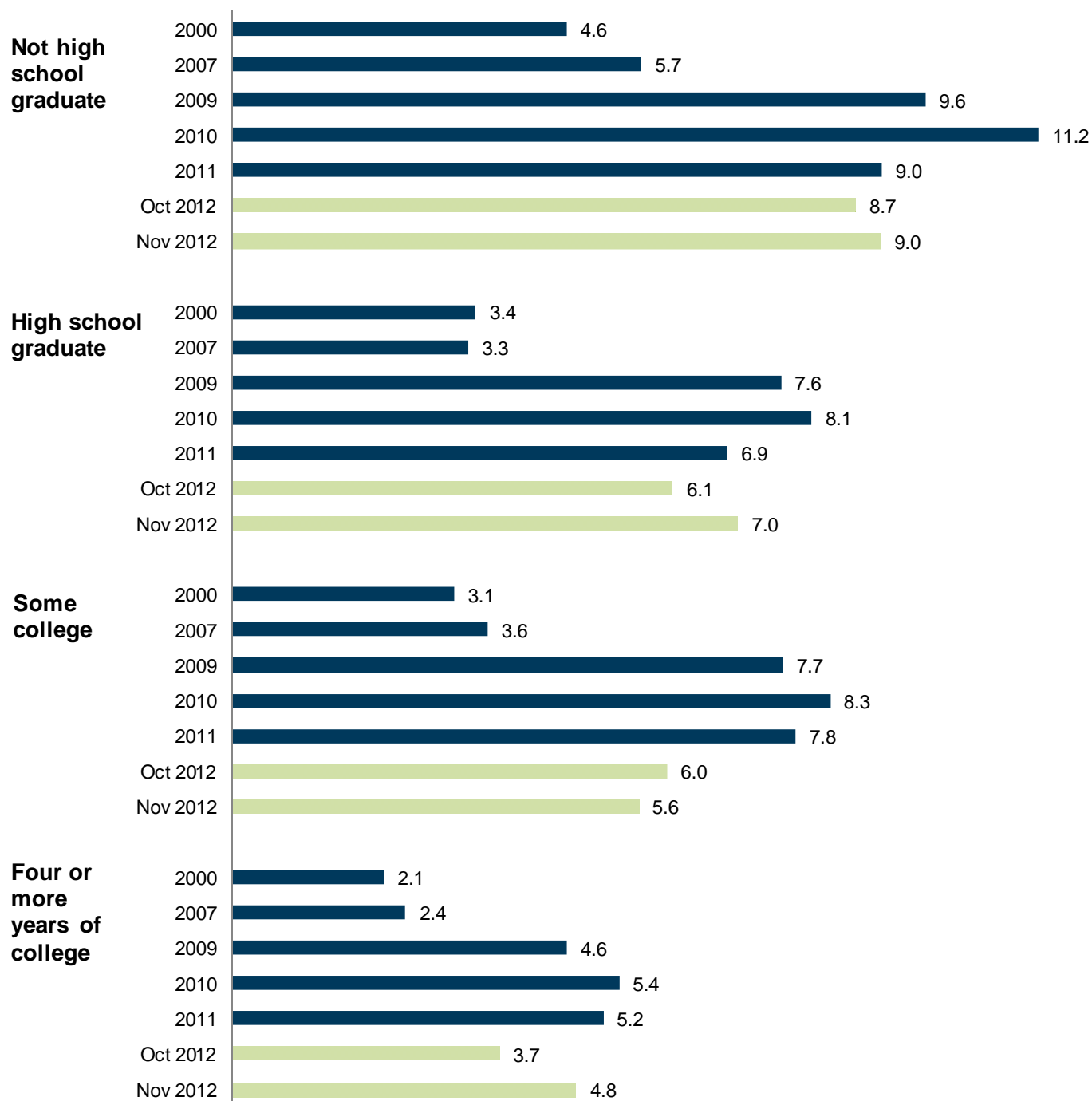
Figure 19. Unemployment Rates by Year and Age, Women Ages 62 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is on layoff or not working but looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

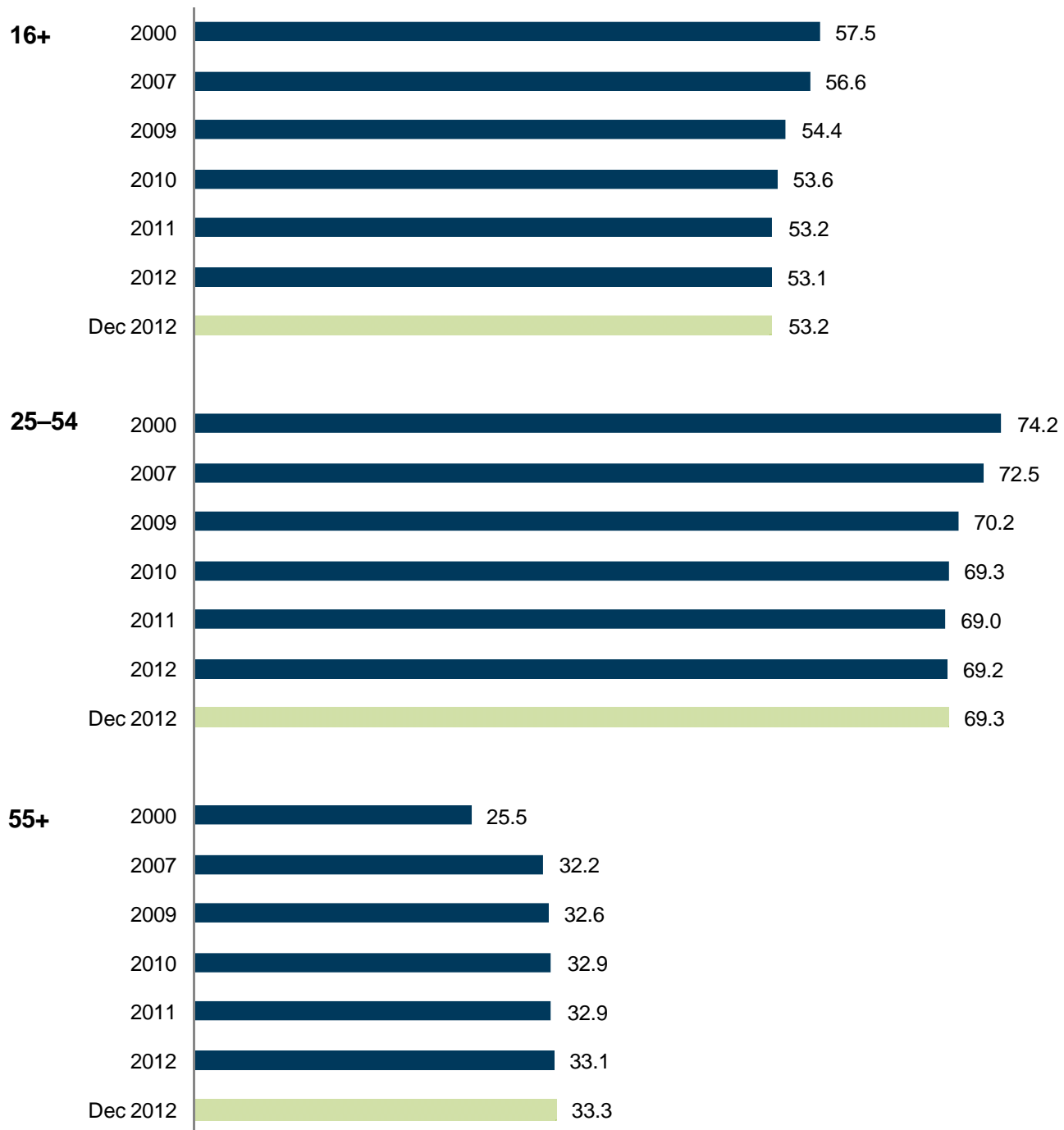
Figure 20. Unemployment Rates by Year and Education, Women Ages 62 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is on layoff or not working but looking for work. Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

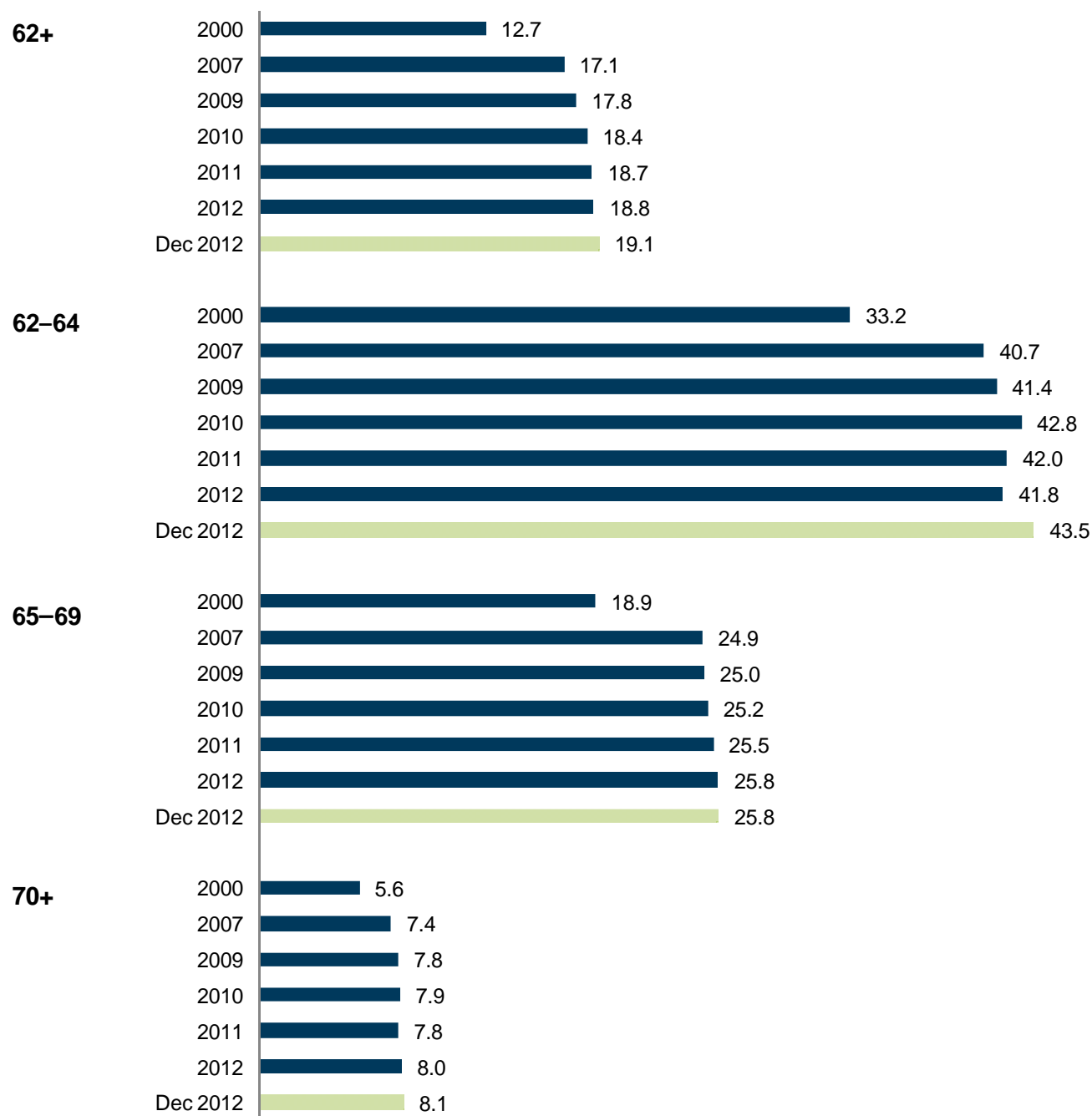
Figure 21. Employment-to-Population Ratios by Year and Age, Women Ages 16 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are seasonally adjusted., except for ages 55 and older.

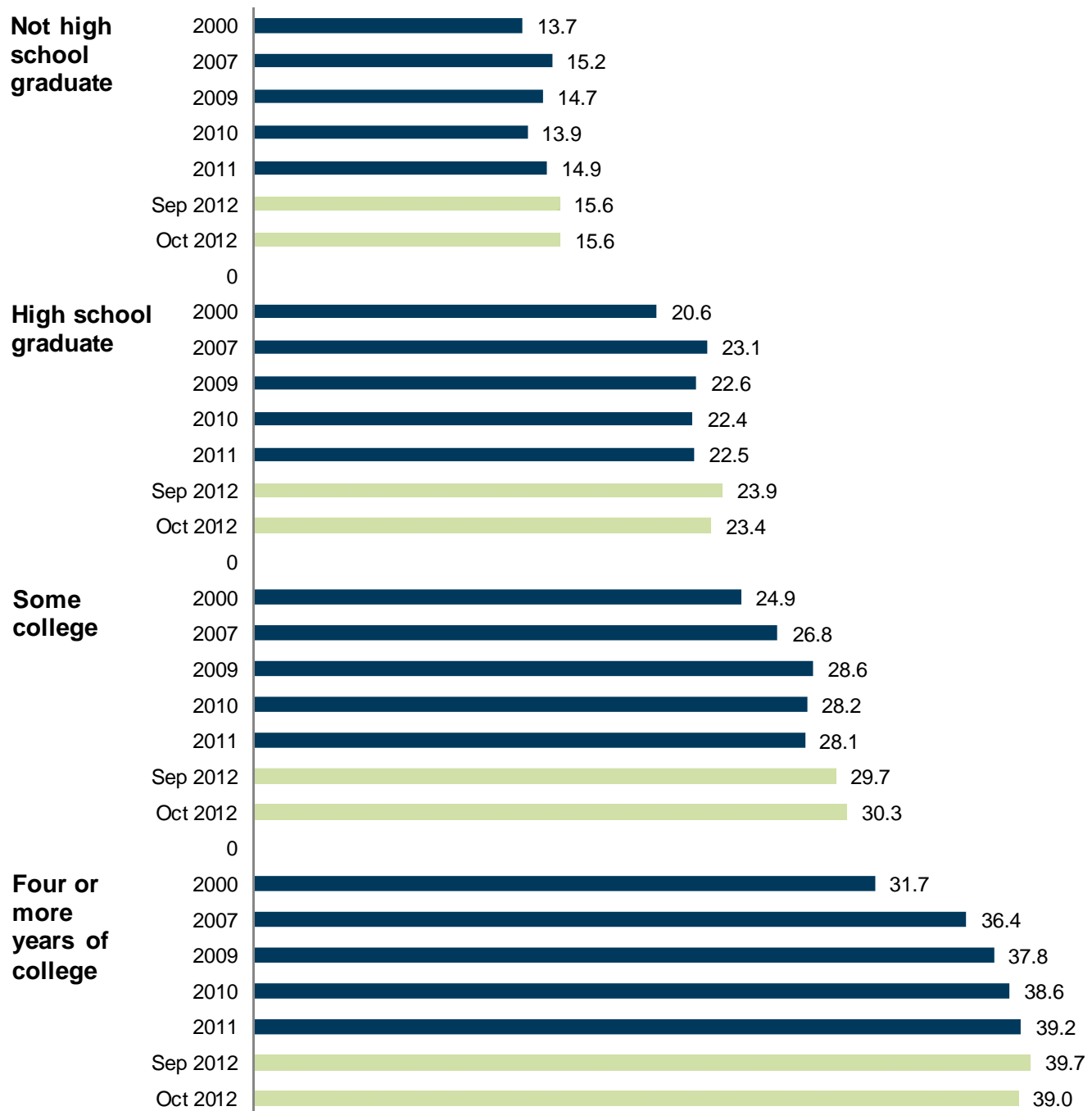
Figure 22. Employment-to-Population Ratios by Year and Age, Women Ages 62 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

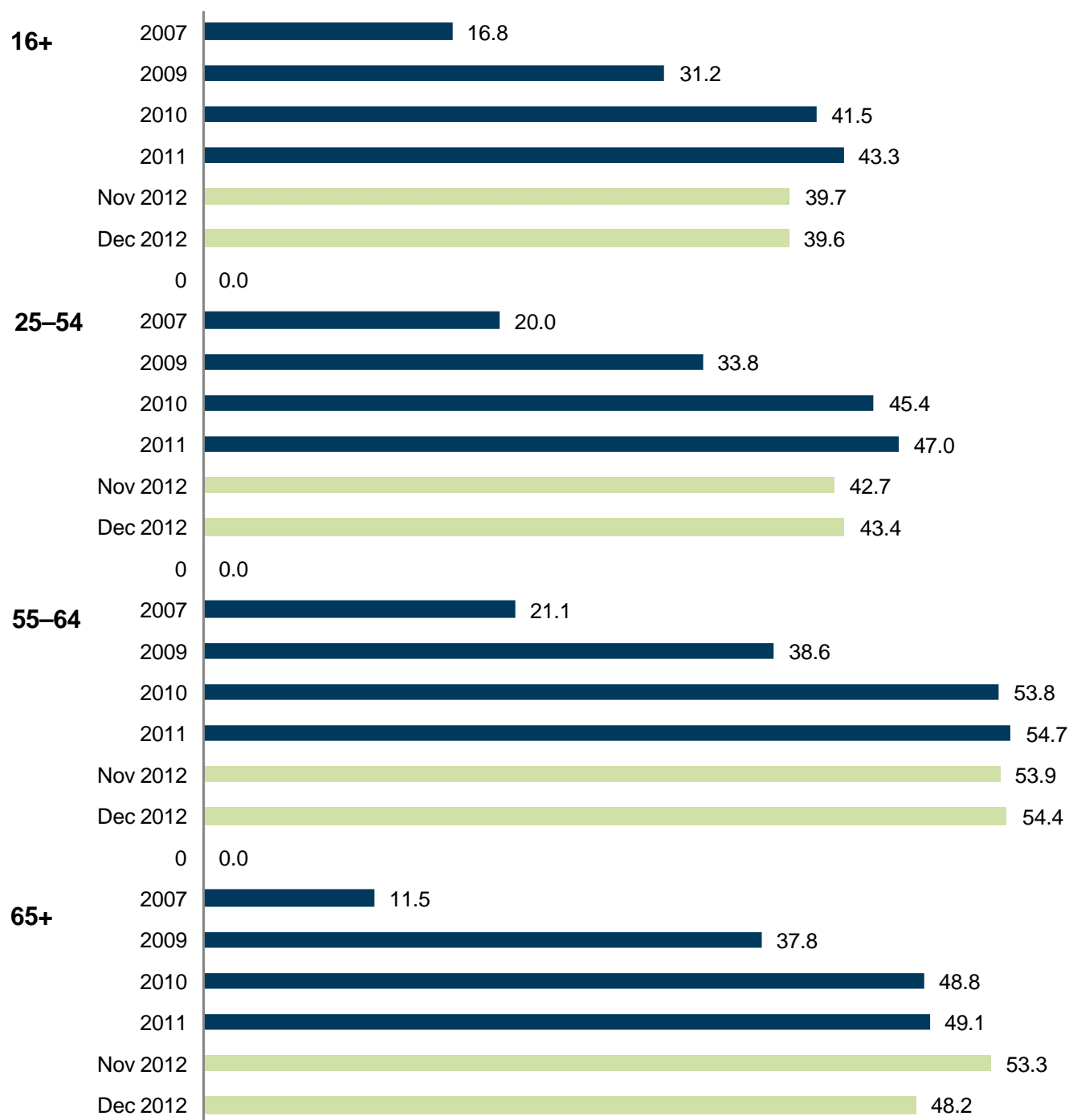
Figure 23. Employment-to-Population Ratios by Year and Education, Women Ages 62 and Older (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

Figure 24. Unemployed Women Out of Work for More Than Six Months by Age and Year (%)



Source: Urban Institute Program on Retirement Policy estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Notes: Annual data are monthly averages for the year. Monthly estimates are not seasonally adjusted.