

**STATISTICAL RELEASE**  
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**Statistics of civil cases for debt**  
**(Preliminary)**

**December 2017**

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## Key results for December 2017

**Table A – Key figures for the month of December 2017**

Actual estimates	December 2017	% change between December 2016 and December 2017	% change between October – December 2016 and October – December 2017	Annual % change between 2016 and 2017
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	37 603	5,7	-3,7	-9,8
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	13 749	-7,9	-11,0	-13,4
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	281,1	11,5	1,4	-1,8

### The number of civil summonses issued for debt

The total number of civil summonses issued for debt decreased by 9,8% in 2017 compared with 2016.

The largest contributions to the 9,8% decrease were civil summonses relating to:

- money lent (contributing -3,8 percentage points);
- services (contributing -3,0 percentage points); and
- promissory notes (contributing -1,3 percentage points) – see Tables 7 and 8.

### The number of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt decreased by 13,4% in 2017 compared with 2016.

The largest negative contributions to the 13,4% decrease were civil judgements relating to:

- services (contributing -5,4 percentage points);
- money lent (contributing -3,8 percentage points); and
- 'other' debts (contributing -3,6 percentage points) – see Tables 7 and 8.

### The value of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt was 1,8% lower in 2017 compared with 2016. The largest contribution to the 1,8% decrease was the value of judgements relating to 'other' debts (contributing -5,5 percentage points).

In 2017, 229 006 civil judgements for debt amounting to R3 948,9 million were recorded. The largest contributors to the total value of judgements were:

- money lent (R1 163,9 million or 29,5%);
- 'other' debts (R770,1 million or 19,5%); and
- services (R752,8 million or 19,1%) – see Tables 2 and 3.

Figure 1 – Civil summonses issued for debt

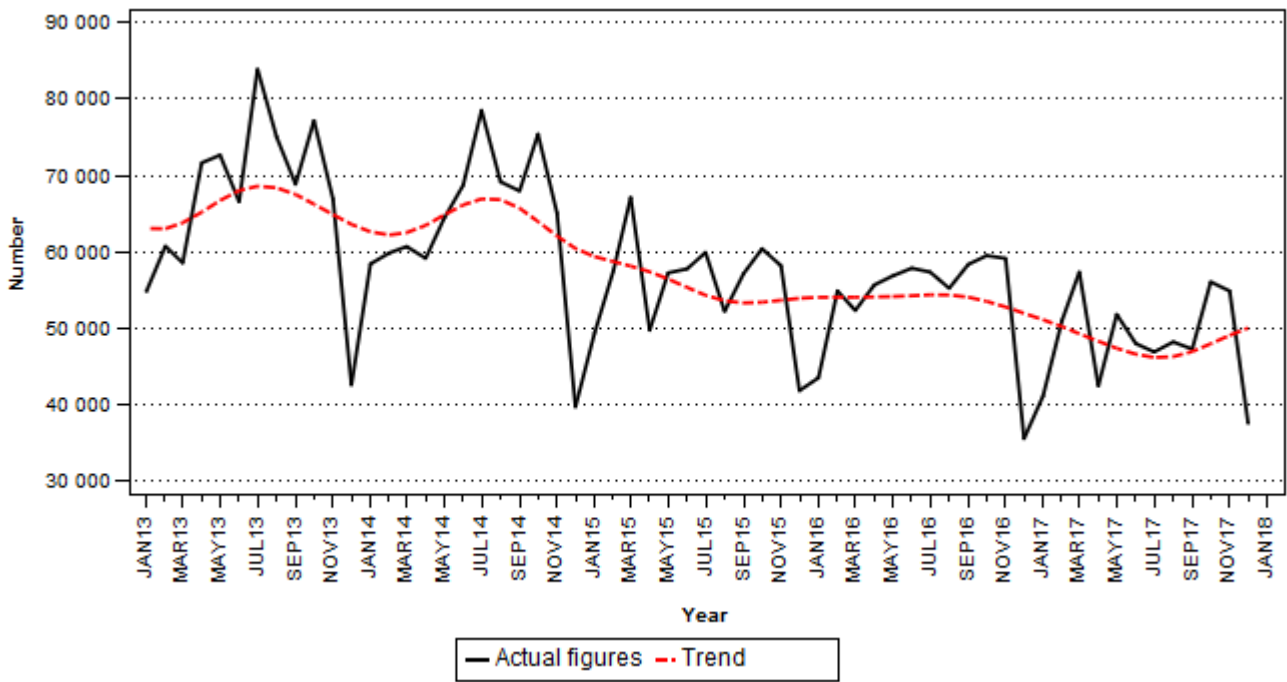
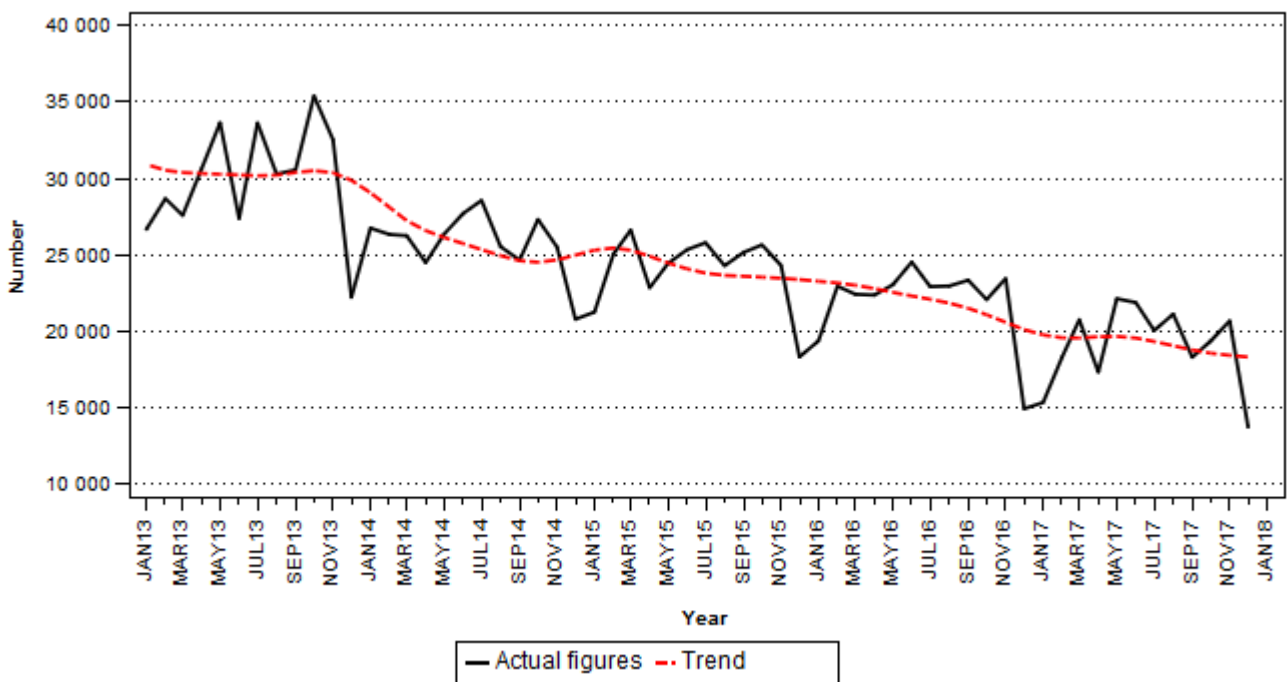


Figure 2 – Civil judgements recorded for debt



Risenga Maluleke  
Statistician-General

**Detailed results: Tables****Table 1 – Number of civil cases recorded and summonses issued for debt: Total and private persons**

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2017	Dec-16	1/ Nov-17	1/ Dec-17	2017	Dec-16	1/ Nov-17	1/ Dec-17
<b>Cases recorded</b>	<b>Actual figures</b>	<b>639 355</b>	<b>38 263</b>	<b>62 474</b>	<b>41 039</b>	<b>548 538</b>	<b>32 649</b>	<b>54 863</b>	<b>35 034</b>
	<b>Seasonally adjusted</b>		53 493	56 209	58 054		46 629	47 382	49 687
<b>Civil summonses for debt</b>	Goods sold - Open account	34 961	2 077	3 456	2 483	25 426	1 456	2 563	1 859
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	21 233	1 173	2 060	1 245	16 778	887	1 657	943
	Services - Professional	71 206	4 217	6 341	5 319	62 068	3 554	5 426	4 664
	Services - Other	98 488	6 307	8 866	6 717	83 660	5 337	7 524	5 716
	Rent	31 726	1 629	3 221	2 196	23 540	1 206	2 359	1 679
	Money lent	131 098	8 282	12 521	7 496	123 147	7 697	11 504	6 942
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	82 316	5 115	7 339	4 745	75 454	4 683	6 766	4 332
	Other debts	111 715	6 779	11 064	7 402	98 973	5 695	9 812	6 578
	<b>Total - Actual figures</b>	<b>582 743</b>	<b>35 579</b>	<b>54 868</b>	<b>37 603</b>	<b>509 046</b>	<b>30 515</b>	<b>47 611</b>	<b>32 713</b>
	<b>Total - Seasonally adjusted</b>		50 696	49 126	54 086		42 911	42 801	46 506

1/ Preliminary.

**Table 2 – Number of civil default and consent judgements for debt: Total and private persons**

Item	Total				Private Persons				
	2017	Dec-16	1/ Nov-17	1/ Dec-17	2017	Dec-16	1/ Nov-17	1/ Dec-17	
<b>Number of civil judgements</b>	Goods sold - Open account	14 897	981	1 327	858	11 296	713	980	603
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	6 829	482	632	381	5 912	404	545	333
	Services - Professional	35 673	2 461	3 208	2 056	32 574	2 025	2 962	1 732
	Services - Other	35 552	2 314	3 328	2 243	31 207	1 959	2 957	1 965
	Rent	18 112	954	1 784	1 057	15 155	746	1 494	858
	Money lent	50 369	2 943	4 112	2 987	46 408	2 647	3 822	2 667
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	25 826	1 589	2 405	1 860	22 218	1 316	2 073	1 614
	Other debts	41 748	3 210	3 885	2 307	38 438	2 770	3 524	2 099
	<b>Total - Actual figures</b>	<b>229 006</b>	<b>14 934</b>	<b>20 681</b>	<b>13 749</b>	<b>203 208</b>	<b>12 580</b>	<b>18 357</b>	<b>11 871</b>
	<b>Total - Seasonally adjusted</b>		19 686	18 659	18 697		16 980	16 676	16 541

1/ Preliminary.

**Table 3 – Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt: Total and private persons (R'000)**

Item	Total				Private Persons				
	2017	Dec-16	1/ Nov-17	1/ Dec-17	2017	Dec-16	1/ Nov-17	1/ Dec-17	
<b>Value of civil judgements</b>	Goods sold - Open account	243 233	14 900	24 104	15 124	115 847	7 684	10 028	7 516
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	133 486	9 288	15 871	8 602	115 030	8 479	13 574	8 082
	Services - Professional	258 812	15 076	30 159	16 487	229 806	12 789	26 980	14 793
	Services - Other	493 962	35 234	49 539	35 374	405 530	27 365	40 788	29 428
	Rent	351 978	17 837	32 117	27 505	243 565	11 334	23 233	22 087
	Money lent	1 163 947	77 669	84 968	82 255	1 064 361	70 572	80 007	75 423
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	533 411	25 117	49 063	39 348	463 911	19 973	41 529	35 924
	Other debts	770 054	56 952	64 479	56 416	627 839	42 126	53 720	45 445
	<b>Total - Actual figures</b>	<b>3 948 883</b>	<b>252 073</b>	<b>350 300</b>	<b>281 111</b>	<b>3 265 889</b>	<b>200 322</b>	<b>289 859</b>	<b>238 698</b>
	<b>Total - Seasonally adjusted</b>		315 013	310 042	358 221		246 397	265 642	301 869

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**Table 4 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between the fourth quarter of 2016 and the fourth quarter of 2017**

Actual estimates	Actual estimates Oct – Dec 2016	Actual estimates Oct – Dec 2017	% change between Oct – Dec 2016 and Oct – Dec 2017	Difference between Oct – Dec 2016 and Oct – Dec 2017
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	154 201	148 530	-3,7	-5 671
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	60 456	53 786	-11,0	-6 670
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	962,8	976,7	1,4	13,9

**Table 5 – Contribution of the different kinds of debt to the change in total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between the fourth quarter of 2016 and the fourth quarter of 2017 1/**

Item	Contribution (% points) to the % change in the total		
	Civil summonses for debt	Number of civil judgements	Value of civil judgements
Goods sold - Open account	0,4	-0,3	0,7
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	0,2	-0,3	0,6
Services - Professional	-0,6	-2,1	2,2
Services - Other	0,1	0,2	1,3
Rent	0,9	-0,1	1,0
Money lent	-4,5	-6,3	-3,5
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-1,4	0,1	2,3
Other debts	1,1	-2,2	-3,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>-3,7</b>	<b>-11,0</b>	<b>1,4</b>

1/ The contribution (percentage points) is calculated by multiplying the three-monthly percentage change of each kind of debt by the percentage contribution to the total during October to December 2016, divided by 100. Due to rounding off, contributions might not add up to the total.

**Table 6 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between the current month and the corresponding month of the previous year**

Actual estimates	Actual estimates December 2016	Actual estimates December 2017	% change between December 2016 and December 2017	Difference between December 2016 and December 2017
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	35 579	37 603	5,7	2 024
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	14 934	13 749	-7,9	-1 185
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	252,1	281,1	11,5	29,0

**Table 7 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses, judgements and the value of judgements recorded between 2016 and 2017**

Actual estimates	Actual estimates 2016	Actual estimates 2017	% change between 2016 and 2017	Difference between 2016 and 2017
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	646 215	582 743	-9,8	-63 472
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	264 329	229 006	-13,4	-35 323
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	4 022,5	3 948,9	-1,8	-73,6

**Table 8 – Contribution of the different kinds of debts to the change in total number of civil summonses, judgements and the value of judgements recorded between 2016 and 2017 1/**

Item	Contribution (% points) to the % change in the total		
	Civil summonses for debt	Number of civil judgements	Value of civil judgements
Goods sold - Open account	-0,7	-0,8	-0,3
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	-0,1	-0,1	0,9
Services - Professional	-1,8	-3,2	0,4
Services - Other	-1,2	-2,2	-1,2
Rent	0,1	-0,1	0,7
Money lent	-3,8	-3,8	0,6
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-1,3	0,3	2,5
Other debts	-0,9	-3,6	-5,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>-9,8</b>	<b>-13,4</b>	<b>-1,8</b>

1/ The contribution (percentage points) is calculated by multiplying the annual percentage change of each kind of debt by the percentage contribution to the total number or value of cases recorded during January to December 2016, divided by 100. Due to rounding off, contributions might not add up to the total.



**Table 9 – Number of civil summonses issued for debt by province**

Period 1/		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
2016	Dec	5 768	2 145	509	2 851	5 978	1 243	13 343	2 009	1 733	35 579
2017	Jan	6 630	3 224	554	3 356	5 507	2 178	16 203	1 541	1 969	41 162
	Feb	8 707	3 749	811	3 309	8 903	2 185	18 837	2 409	2 136	51 046
	Mar	10 515	4 635	1 040	3 941	8 972	2 538	20 565	2 661	2 479	57 346
	Apr	6 795	3 197	618	2 807	7 746	1 954	15 012	1 999	2 330	42 458
	May	9 102	4 100	808	3 355	9 295	2 358	18 167	2 530	2 096	51 811
	Jun	7 263	3 923	568	3 529	8 739	2 083	17 602	2 270	2 025	48 002
	Jul	7 914	3 368	876	2 755	8 662	2 079	16 897	2 249	2 102	46 902
	Aug	8 188	3 820	913	3 724	9 297	2 282	15 858	2 269	1 857	48 208
	Sep	7 081	3 527	531	3 500	9 689	2 258	16 361	2 356	1 975	47 278
	Oct	10 612	4 025	941	4 133	10 752	2 368	18 640	2 427	2 161	56 059
	Nov	9 654	4 116	748	3 737	11 055	2 139	18 751	2 550	2 118	54 868
	Dec	6 850	2 203	384	1 956	7 041	1 146	14 575	1 888	1 560	37 603

1/ Latest two months are preliminary.

**Table 10 – Number of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province**

Period 1/		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
2016	Dec	2 147	1 240	410	1 319	2 698	715	4 416	943	1 046	14 934
2017	Jan	2 541	2 201	226	1 657	2 034	659	3 922	1 048	1 054	15 342
	Feb	3 370	2 019	292	1 788	3 843	925	4 211	765	1 099	18 312
	Mar	4 019	2 876	539	2 175	3 577	1 001	3 999	1 265	1 300	20 751
	Apr	2 475	2 309	351	2 185	3 386	781	3 664	863	1 318	17 332
	May	4 442	2 732	480	2 594	3 954	1 006	4 610	1 048	1 262	22 128
	Jun	3 368	3 627	389	2 370	3 964	1 100	4 256	1 159	1 646	21 879
	Jul	3 314	2 584	381	2 424	3 951	909	4 306	930	1 252	20 051
	Aug	3 418	2 614	412	2 409	4 586	985	4 460	1 025	1 210	21 119
	Sep	2 524	2 093	359	1 915	4 337	914	4 010	1 052	1 102	18 306
	Oct	2 698	2 567	464	2 016	4 308	674	4 443	1 053	1 133	19 356
	Nov	3 214	2 668	488	2 023	4 837	831	4 227	1 207	1 186	20 681
	Dec	2 311	1 409	238	1 329	2 311	658	3 575	891	1 027	13 749

1/ Latest two months are preliminary.

**Table 11 – Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province (R'000)**

Period 1/		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
2016	Dec	42 778	34 684	3 662	18 302	38 753	10 860	73 189	24 034	5 811	252 073
2017	Jan	42 093	44 928	3 266	21 097	27 757	9 980	58 734	24 055	8 894	240 804
	Feb	67 812	35 384	3 094	19 788	39 303	14 398	81 496	15 697	6 534	283 506
	Mar	71 623	55 846	6 302	26 937	46 972	12 822	95 561	26 632	13 150	355 845
	Apr	50 854	43 565	3 289	25 210	40 619	11 248	68 299	18 608	12 992	274 684
	May	93 019	57 820	5 662	36 927	53 567	15 437	109 482	20 889	10 124	402 927
	Jun	66 175	42 752	5 050	35 011	42 347	16 976	100 206	27 212	14 320	350 049
	Jul	75 513	42 107	3 528	28 203	48 404	15 257	117 998	21 315	11 234	363 559
	Aug	72 344	56 148	3 477	33 413	64 052	13 728	109 487	18 897	8 456	380 002
	Sep	62 053	43 197	3 507	21 904	43 157	14 234	106 964	20 044	5 722	320 782
	Oct	59 381	52 158	4 550	25 920	58 123	10 015	108 307	20 078	6 782	345 314
	Nov	72 121	40 185	5 575	27 027	69 361	11 174	92 519	24 124	8 214	350 300
	Dec	65 295	30 452	2 864	21 973	33 524	12 629	87 845	21 737	4 792	281 111

1/ Latest two months are preliminary.

## Explanatory notes

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>	Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) conducts a monthly sample survey of civil cases recorded and civil summonses for debt issued in South Africa. This information is obtained from selected magistrates' offices.
	<b>2</b>	Except for cases recorded, all other information relates to debt cases only, therefore claims for damages, ejection orders and other non-debt cases are excluded.
<b>Purpose of the survey</b>	<b>3</b>	The survey of civil cases for debt covers a sample of magistrates' offices in South Africa. This survey collects information regarding civil cases recorded, civil summonses issued and civil judgements recorded in order to provide users with information on the extent of unpaid debt in South Africa. The results of the survey are used by the private and public sectors as an indicator of economic performance.
<b>Scope of the survey</b>	<b>4</b>	This survey covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of civil cases recorded;</li> <li>• number of civil summonses issued for debt;</li> <li>• number of civil judgements recorded for debt; and</li> <li>• value of civil judgements recorded for debt.</li> </ul>
<b>Statistical unit</b>	<b>5</b>	The statistical unit for collection of information is a magistrate's office. Magistrates' offices include the small claims courts.  The largest magistrates' offices in South Africa are included in the monthly survey of civil cases for debt. The monthly survey of 203 magistrates' courts represents approximately 98% of all cases in South Africa.
<b>Survey methodology and design</b>	<b>6</b>	The survey is conducted by email, fax and telephone each month from 203 magistrates' offices.
<b>Collection rate</b>	<b>7</b>	The preliminary collection rate for the civil cases for debt survey for December 2017 was 85,7%. The improved collection rate for November 2017 was 86,2%.
<b>Seasonal adjustment</b>	<b>8</b>	Seasonally adjusted estimates of all categories are generated each month, using the X-12 Seasonal Adjustment Program developed by the US Bureau of the Census, 1968. Seasonal adjustment is a means of removing the estimated effects of normal seasonal variation from the series so that the effects of other influences on the series can be more clearly recognised. Seasonal adjustment does not aim to remove irregular or non-seasonal influences, which may be present in any particular month. Influences that are volatile or unsystematic can still make it difficult to interpret the movement of the series even after adjustment for seasonal variations. Therefore the month-to-month movements of seasonally adjusted estimates may not be reliable indicators of trend behaviour. The X-12-ARIMA procedure for civil cases for debt is described in more detail on the Stats SA website: <a href="#">Click to download seasonal adjustment for civil cases for debt.</a>
<b>Trend cycle</b>	<b>9</b>	The trend is the long-term pattern or movement of a time series. The X-12-ARIMA Seasonal Adjustment Program is used for smoothing seasonally adjusted estimates to estimate the underlying trend cycle.
<b>Unpublished statistics</b>	<b>10</b>	In some cases Stats SA can also make available statistics which are not published.
<b>Symbols and abbreviations</b>	<b>11</b>	R/D      Refer to drawer Stats SA    Statistics South Africa *            Revised figures

## Glossary

<b>Acknowledgement of debt</b>	Acknowledgement of debt is a statement by a person/debtor in which he admits that he owes money to an individual or a company or a bank.
<b>Bills</b>	Bills are statements of charges for services rendered or for amounts owed.
<b>Cases recorded</b>	Includes civil debt and non-debt cases recorded.
<b>Civil judgements</b>	Civil judgements are decisions taken in a civil matter or a dispute between two people or parties.
<b>Civil summonses</b>	Civil summonses are notices to appear before the court of law where a dispute between two parties or people has to be heard, i.e. not for a criminal offence.
<b>Consent judgements</b>	Consent judgements refer to where a debtor agrees to subject himself/herself to obey or accept a judgement of a court against him for debt he owes without defending the action.
<b>Default judgements</b>	Default judgements refer to where the court gives a judgement or a ruling against the defendant who is not present in court and was previously given a notice that was ignored, i.e. a judgement was given against a party or an individual while not present in court.
<b>Instalment sale transaction</b>	Instalment sale transaction relates to where a person buys goods on credit and pays for them in instalments, e.g. every week or month, until he/she settles the debt.
<b>Litigants</b>	Litigants are people who take part in court proceedings, usually against each other, like a debtor and a creditor.
<b>Litigants referred</b>	Litigants referred relates to a case where the parties have been referred to another instance/court.
<b>Open account transaction</b>	Open account transactions are revolving credit, i.e. where an account does not have a final payment date and a person can always take more goods and keep paying as long as he has credit.
<b>Other services</b>	'Other services' refers to municipal services (except outstanding assessment rates), plumbers, builders, mechanics, panel beaters and electricians.
<b>Other debts</b>	'Other debts' refers to all other kinds of outstanding debt such as salaries and wages, medical fund debt, sponsored debt, class and tuition debt, tax, assessment rates and property levies.
<b>Plaintiff</b>	Plaintiff is a person/party in a civil case who asks the court for judgement against another person.
<b>Professional services</b>	Professional services refer to medical doctors, dentists, advocates, attorneys, auditors, accountants, architects, engineers, hospital services, etc.
<b>Promissory note</b>	Promissory note is a written undertaking, signed by a person or party, to pay money to another person or to the bearer of such a note on a specific date or on demand.
<b>Reference month</b>	Reference month refers to one calendar month.
<b>Refer to drawer (R/D) cheques</b>	R/D cheques refer to dishonoured cheques. The drawer is the owner of the cheque. When a person issues a cheque and there is no money in the cheque account, the bank will refuse to pay the bearer. The cheque will be referred back to the drawer.

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