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## **STATISTICAL RELEASE**

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# Statistics of civil cases for debt (Preliminary)

December 2023

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## Contents

<b>Key results for December 2023 .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Table A – Key figures for the month of December 2023 .....	2
Figure 1 – Civil summonses issued for debt.....	3
Figure 2 – Civil judgements recorded for debt.....	3
<b>Detailed results: Tables .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Table 1 – Number of civil cases recorded and summonses issued for debt: Total and private persons .....	4
Table 2 – Number of civil default and consent judgements for debt: Total and private persons .....	5
Table 3 – Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt: Total and private persons (R'000) .....	5
Table 4 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between the fourth quarter of 2022 and the fourth quarter of 2023 .....	6
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 2022 and the fourth quarter of 2023 .....	6
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...6	6
Table 7 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between 2022 and 2023.....	7
Table 8 – 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 2022 and 2023 .....	7
Table 9 – Number of civil summonses issued for debt by province .....	8
Table 10 – Number of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province .....	8
Table 11 – Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province (R'000) .....	8
<b>Explanatory notes .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>General information .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Technical enquiries.....</b>	<b>11</b>

## Key results for December 2023

**Table A – Key figures for the month of December 2023**

Actual estimates	December 2023	% change between December 2022 and December 2023	% change between October – December 2022 and October – December 2023	Annual % change between 2022 and 2023
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	22 151	-27,6	-11,7	-3,6
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	8 394	-2,0	0,6	-0,5
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	237,9	11,5	4,7	5,9

### The number of civil summonses issued for debt

The total number of civil summonses issued for debt in 2023 decreased by 3,6% compared with 2022.

The largest negative contributors to the 3,6% decrease were civil summonses relating to:

- money lent (contributing -3,3 percentage points); and
- goods sold (contributing -1,0 percentage point).

Civil summonses relating to 'other' debts (contributing 1,4 percentage points) were the largest positive contributor – see Table 8.

### The number of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt in 2023 decreased by 0,5% compared with 2022.

Negative contributors to the 0,5% decrease were civil judgements relating to:

- money lent (contributing -2,2 percentage points); and
- goods sold (contributing -2,0 percentage points).

'Other' debts made the largest positive contribution (contributing 2,9 percentage points) – see Table 8.

### The value of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt in 2023 increased by 5,9% compared with 2022.

Positive contributors to the 5,9% increase were civil judgements relating to:

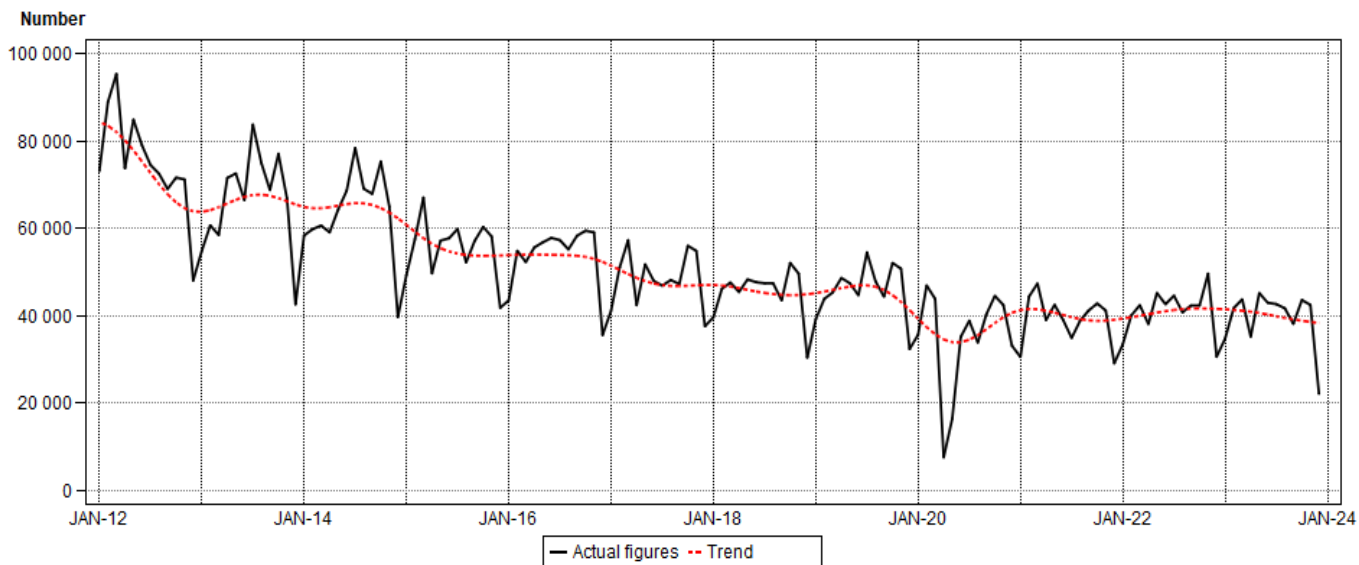
- 'other' debts (contributing 3,1 percentage points); and
- services (contributing 2,4 percentage points).

Goods sold made the largest negative contribution (contributing -1,7 percentage points) – see Table 8.

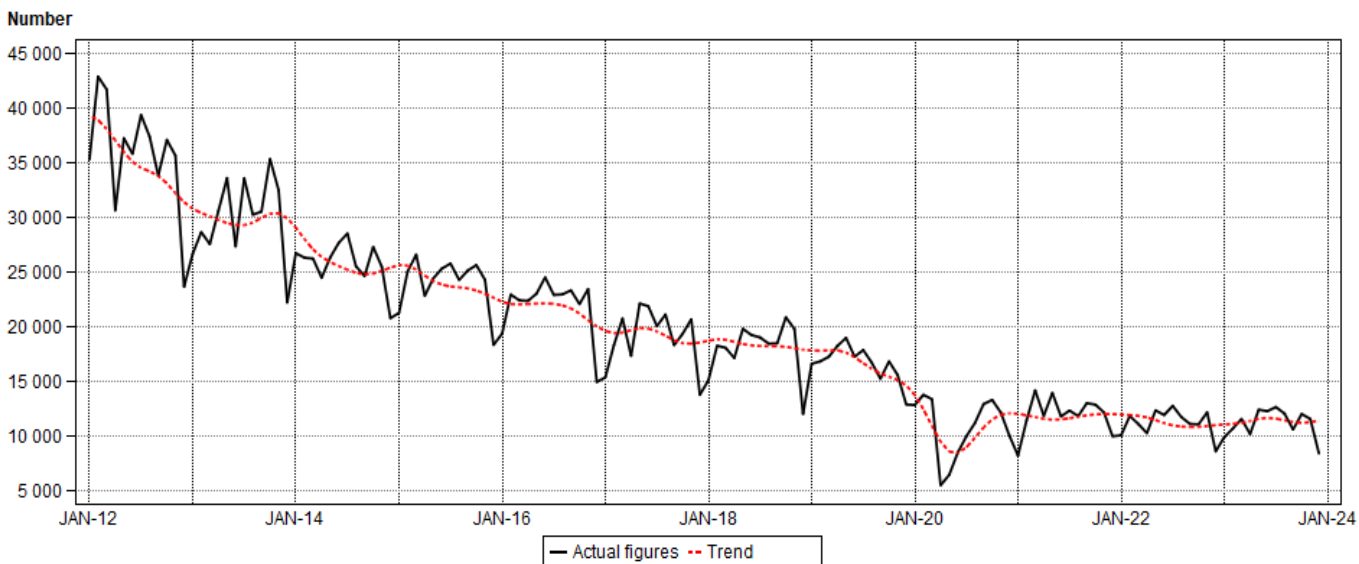
In 2023, 134 048 civil judgements for debt amounting to R3 624,1 million were recorded. The largest contributors to the total value of judgements were:

- money lent (R1 068,1 million or 29,5%);
- services (R755,3 million or 20,8%); and
- 'other' debts (R733,3 million or 20,2%) – 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			
		2023	Dec-22	Nov-23 <sup>1</sup>	Dec-23 <sup>1</sup>	2023	Dec-22	Nov-23 <sup>1</sup>	Dec-23 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Cases recorded</b>	<b>Actual figures</b>	<b>490 676</b>	<b>32 206</b>	<b>42 952</b>	<b>22 767</b>	<b>409 054</b>	<b>27 897</b>	<b>36 929</b>	<b>18 125</b>
	<b>Seasonally adjusted</b>		44 413	37 498	39 282		38 570	31 677	32 500
<b>Civil summonses for debt</b>	Goods sold - Open account	19 916	1 076	1 529	1 186	11 950	688	948	680
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	13 520	1 297	1 255	820	10 473	1 138	1 011	617
	Services - Professional	61 263	3 124	5 352	2 793	44 563	2 531	3 659	1 940
	Services - Other	67 962	3 940	6 690	3 088	57 673	3 463	6 030	2 615
	Rent	24 111	1 953	1 974	1 505	16 559	1 403	1 464	858
	Money lent	105 053	8 258	8 461	5 032	97 497	7 818	7 932	4 531
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	43 594	2 734	3 442	1 865	39 607	2 587	3 233	1 603
	Other debts	139 107	8 230	13 785	5 862	122 535	7 478	12 247	4 876
	<b>Total - Actual figures</b>	<b>474 526</b>	<b>30 612</b>	<b>42 488</b>	<b>22 151</b>	<b>400 857</b>	<b>27 106</b>	<b>36 524</b>	<b>17 720</b>
	<b>Total - Seasonally adjusted</b>		42 456	37 103	37 790		37 135	31 101	31 658

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary.

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

	Item	Total				Private Persons			
		2023	Dec-22	Nov-23 <sup>1</sup>	Dec-23 <sup>1</sup>	2023	Dec-22	Nov-23 <sup>1</sup>	Dec-23 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Number of civil judgements</b>	Goods sold - Open account	6 569	443	562	407	3 398	232	309	241
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	3 053	165	224	210	2 376	115	173	168
	Services - Professional	22 620	1 432	2 193	1 260	16 987	1 163	1 475	894
	Services - Other	24 237	1 658	2 199	2 143	21 286	1 472	2 024	1 952
	Rent	10 708	691	1 063	681	7 908	456	832	528
	Money lent	29 247	2 140	2 205	1 664	26 674	1 957	2 045	1 535
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	11 634	610	930	682	9 986	529	867	548
	Other debts	25 980	1 430	2 167	1 347	21 394	1 163	1 956	1 094
	<b>Total - Actual figures</b>	<b>134 048</b>	<b>8 569</b>	<b>11 543</b>	<b>8 394</b>	<b>110 009</b>	<b>7 087</b>	<b>9 681</b>	<b>6 960</b>
	<b>Total - Seasonally adjusted</b>		10 992	10 846	12 381		9 227	8 836	10 709

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary.**Table 3 – Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt: Total and private persons (R'000)**

	Item	Total				Private Persons			
		2023	Dec-22	Nov-23 <sup>1</sup>	Dec-23 <sup>1</sup>	2023	Dec-22	Nov-23 <sup>1</sup>	Dec-23 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Value of civil judgements</b>	Goods sold - Open account	162 493	9 837	12 802	9 316	52 463	3 007	4 189	4 043
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	95 057	5 234	6 430	6 789	73 549	3 223	4 542	5 501
	Services - Professional	275 554	13 528	36 822	15 861	161 863	8 711	15 927	7 411
	Services - Other	479 711	25 384	43 096	40 676	396 583	21 621	38 421	33 687
	Rent	361 144	21 119	36 850	24 804	256 500	17 303	28 153	17 274
	Money lent	1 068 083	76 158	84 740	63 110	1 010 531	71 624	78 848	60 931
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	448 744	20 668	45 820	30 596	398 584	18 469	40 213	23 427
	Other debts	733 267	41 495	73 153	46 778	592 177	29 637	64 092	35 612
	<b>Total - Actual figures</b>	<b>3 624 053</b>	<b>213 423</b>	<b>339 713</b>	<b>237 930</b>	<b>2 942 250</b>	<b>173 595</b>	<b>274 385</b>	<b>187 886</b>
	<b>Total - Seasonally adjusted</b>		263 150	294 365	307 318		212 204	238 331	244 471

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary.

**Table 4 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between the fourth quarter of 2022 and the fourth quarter of 2023**

Actual estimates	Actual estimates Oct – Dec 2022	Actual estimates Oct – Dec 2023	% change between Oct – Dec 2022 and Oct – Dec 2023	Difference between Oct – Dec 2022 and Oct – Dec 2023
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	122 608	108 256	-11,7	-14 352
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	31 755	31 930	0,6	175
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	864,2	904,6	4,7	40,4

**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 2022 and the fourth quarter of 2023 <sup>1</sup>**

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	0,0	0,7	-0,5
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	-0,3	-0,2	-0,8
Services - Professional	0,3	2,1	3,1
Services - Other	-1,5	0,3	1,6
Rent	-1,0	1,8	1,8
Money lent	-6,3	-2,7	-1,7
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-0,4	-1,8	0,0
Other debts	-2,5	0,4	1,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>-11,7</b>	<b>0,6</b>	<b>4,7</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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 2022, 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 2022	Actual estimates December 2023	% change between December 2022 and December 2023	Difference between December 2022 and December 2023
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	30 612	22 151	-27,6	-8 461
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	8 569	8 394	-2,0	-175
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	213,4	237,9	11,5	24,5

**Table 7 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between 2022 and 2023**

Actual estimates	Actual estimates 2022	Actual estimates 2023	% change between 2022 and 2023	Difference between 2022 and 2023
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	492 358	474 526	-3,6	-17 832
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	134 683	134 048	-0,5	-635
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	3 422,6	3 624,1	5,9	201,5

**Table 8 – 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 2022 and 2023 <sup>1</sup>**

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	-0,4	0,0
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	-0,3	-1,6	-1,7
Services - Professional	0,9	1,1	1,5
Services - Other	-1,1	-0,3	0,9
Rent	-0,2	0,0	0,2
Money lent	-3,3	-2,2	1,0
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-0,3	0,0	0,9
Other debts	1,4	2,9	3,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>-3,6</b>	<b>-0,5</b>	<b>5,9</b>

<sup>1</sup> The contribution (percentage points) is calculated by multiplying the annual percentage change of each kind of debt by the percentage contribution to the total during January to December 2022, 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 <sup>1</sup>		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
<b>2022</b>	<b>Dec</b>	7 259	2 627	426	1 450	5 856	994	8 300	2 244	1 456	<b>30 612</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>Jan</b>	5 929	2 289	226	2 239	7 652	2 000	10 458	2 414	1 574	<b>34 781</b>
	<b>Feb</b>	8 085	3 583	535	2 663	7 860	1 803	13 088	2 454	1 687	<b>41 758</b>
	<b>Mar</b>	10 472	3 326	577	2 070	7 387	1 940	13 736	2 579	1 679	<b>43 766</b>
	<b>Apr</b>	8 307	2 722	286	1 353	6 537	1 437	11 143	1 836	1 583	<b>35 204</b>
	<b>May</b>	10 243	2 775	577	1 812	8 030	1 883	15 079	3 010	1 805	<b>45 214</b>
	<b>Jun</b>	10 394	2 649	373	2 258	6 827	1 660	14 099	2 747	1 982	<b>42 989</b>
	<b>Jul</b>	9 434	2 643	545	2 623	6 117	1 691	14 552	3 249	1 830	<b>42 684</b>
	<b>Aug</b>	9 672	2 217	488	2 275	6 966	1 740	13 540	3 103	1 702	<b>41 703</b>
	<b>Sep</b>	8 565	1 954	544	2 172	6 391	1 573	12 903	2 277	1 792	<b>38 171</b>
	<b>Oct</b>	9 744	2 758	438	2 630	7 032	1 927	14 103	2 947	2 038	<b>43 617</b>
	<b>Nov</b>	10 585	2 856	403	2 418	6 644	1 625	14 280	1 954	1 723	<b>42 488</b>
<b>Dec</b>	5 294	1 862	296	1 212	3 953	777	5 718	1 736	1 303	<b>22 151</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Latest three months are preliminary.**Table 10 – Number of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province**

Period <sup>1</sup>		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
<b>2022</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>Dec</b>	1 574	887	62	811	1 045	325	1 835	1 005	1 025	<b>8 569</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>Jan</b>	1 739	1 044	139	849	1 057	384	2 130	1 521	1 015	<b>9 878</b>
	<b>Feb</b>	2 557	1 245	184	826	1 518	359	2 106	760	1 109	<b>10 664</b>
	<b>Mar</b>	2 326	1 120	175	622	1 352	671	3 061	1 043	1 169	<b>11 539</b>
	<b>Apr</b>	2 224	1 046	186	722	1 104	379	2 719	707	1 073	<b>10 160</b>
	<b>May</b>	2 995	993	201	1 229	1 176	353	3 488	746	1 206	<b>12 387</b>
	<b>Jun</b>	2 747	874	195	1 401	1 118	624	3 116	976	1 202	<b>12 253</b>
	<b>Jul</b>	2 599	740	209	1 069	1 039	549	4 030	1 260	1 136	<b>12 631</b>
	<b>Aug</b>	2 673	701	198	746	1 405	510	3 152	1 477	1 171	<b>12 033</b>
	<b>Sep</b>	2 581	650	141	755	1 028	600	2 763	880	1 175	<b>10 573</b>
	<b>Oct</b>	2 556	786	134	860	1 158	527	3 347	1 356	1 269	<b>11 993</b>
	<b>Nov</b>	2 476	877	115	877	931	399	3 577	1 049	1 242	<b>11 543</b>
<b>Dec</b>	1 704	621	130	505	867	385	2 597	492	1 093	<b>8 394</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Latest three months are preliminary.**Table 11 – Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province (R'000)**

Period <sup>1</sup>		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
<b>2022</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>Dec</b>	57 645	19 558	1 109	12 588	37 464	5 755	62 864	11 058	5 381	<b>213 423</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>Jan</b>	48 201	23 145	2 715	17 834	41 083	6 105	59 324	24 540	4 736	<b>227 681</b>
	<b>Feb</b>	71 239	26 228	2 548	20 787	55 818	6 367	78 357	15 896	7 331	<b>284 572</b>
	<b>Mar</b>	61 558	24 352	2 314	12 695	61 358	15 708	91 994	16 891	9 394	<b>296 265</b>
	<b>Apr</b>	74 130	27 959	2 422	17 584	39 905	12 650	65 687	15 301	7 228	<b>262 865</b>
	<b>May</b>	96 915	32 086	3 204	22 883	50 094	6 182	95 649	21 852	11 895	<b>340 761</b>
	<b>Jun</b>	87 902	24 636	3 690	26 244	46 216	11 052	90 188	25 969	10 839	<b>326 736</b>
	<b>Jul</b>	80 322	25 666	3 902	23 351	42 213	11 147	111 543	29 700	9 197	<b>337 041</b>
	<b>Aug</b>	78 292	24 411	3 360	15 779	55 587	10 376	106 620	25 324	9 999	<b>329 748</b>
	<b>Sep</b>	71 846	21 282	2 393	15 384	42 508	11 085	120 205	18 895	10 203	<b>313 803</b>
	<b>Oct</b>	67 768	18 705	2 433	15 977	56 642	12 759	118 072	21 213	13 369	<b>326 938</b>
	<b>Nov</b>	77 605	24 067	2 049	21 211	32 732	7 444	140 526	22 692	11 387	<b>339 713</b>
<b>Dec</b>	44 935	14 115	1 965	9 298	33 139	11 168	102 153	13 283	7 874	<b>237 930</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Latest three 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 2023 was 81,8%. The improved collection rate for November 2023 was 80,8%.
<b>Rounding-off of figures</b>	<b>8</b>	Where figures have been rounded off, discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and the totals.
<b>Seasonal adjustment</b>	<b>9</b>	Seasonally adjusted estimates of all categories are generated each month, using the X-12 Seasonal Adjustment Program developed by the United States Census Bureau. 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 February 2022.</a>
<b>Trend cycle</b>	<b>10</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>11</b>	In some cases, Stats SA can also make available statistics which are not published.
<b>Symbols and abbreviations</b>	<b>12</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 refer to municipal services (except outstanding assessment rates), plumbers, builders, mechanics, panel beaters and electricians.
<b>Other debts</b>	Other debts refer 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.

## General information

Stats SA publishes approximately 300 different statistical releases each year. It is not economically viable to produce them in more than one of South Africa's 12 official languages. Since the releases are used extensively, not only locally but also by international economic and social-scientific communities, Stats SA releases are published in English only.

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