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STATISTICAL RELEASE

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Statistics of civil cases for debt (Preliminary)

January 2024

This release provides an analysis of revisions. If you have any questions or comments, please send these to Joyce Essel-Mensah, joycee@statssa.gov.za.

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Key results for January 2024

Table A – Key figures for the month of January 2024

Actual estimates	January 2024	% change between January 2023 and January 2024	% change between November 2022 – January 2023 and November 2023 – January 2024
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	33 186	-4,6	-15,0
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	9 327	-5,6	-4,3
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	269,2	18,3	9,2

The number of civil summonses issued for debt

The total number of civil summonses issued for debt decreased by 15,0% in the three months ended January 2024 compared with the three months ended January 2023.

The largest negative contributors to the 15,0% decrease in civil summonses issued were:

- money lent (contributing -7,8 percentage points);
- services (contributing -4,4 percentage points); and
- promissory notes (contributing -1,6 percentage points).

'Other' debts was the only positive contributor (contributing 1,4 percentage points) – see Table 5.

The number of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt decreased by 4,3% in the three months ended January 2024 compared with the three months ended January 2023.

The largest negative contributors to the 4,3% decrease were civil judgements relating to:

- money lent (contributing -5,0 percentage points);
- promissory notes (contributing -0,9 of a percentage point); and
- 'other' debts (contributing -0,8 of a percentage point).

Services was the largest positive contributor (contributing 1,4 percentage points) – see Table 5.

The value of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt increased by 9,2% in the three months ended January 2024 compared with the three months ended January 2023.

The largest positive contributors to the 9,2% increase were civil judgements relating to:

- services (contributing 5,1 percentage points);
- 'other' debts (contributing 2,7 percentage points);
- rent (contributing 2,5 percentage points); and
- promissory notes (contributing 2,4 percentage points).

Money lent was the largest negative contributor (contributing -3,2 percentage points) – see Table 5.

In January 2024, 9 327 civil judgements for debt amounting to R269,2 million were recorded. The largest contributors to the total value of judgements were:

- money lent (R68,5 million or 25,4%);
- 'other' debts (R56,5 million or 21,0%); and
- services (R54,7 million or 20,3%) – see Tables 2 and 3.

Figure 1 – Civil summonses issued for debt

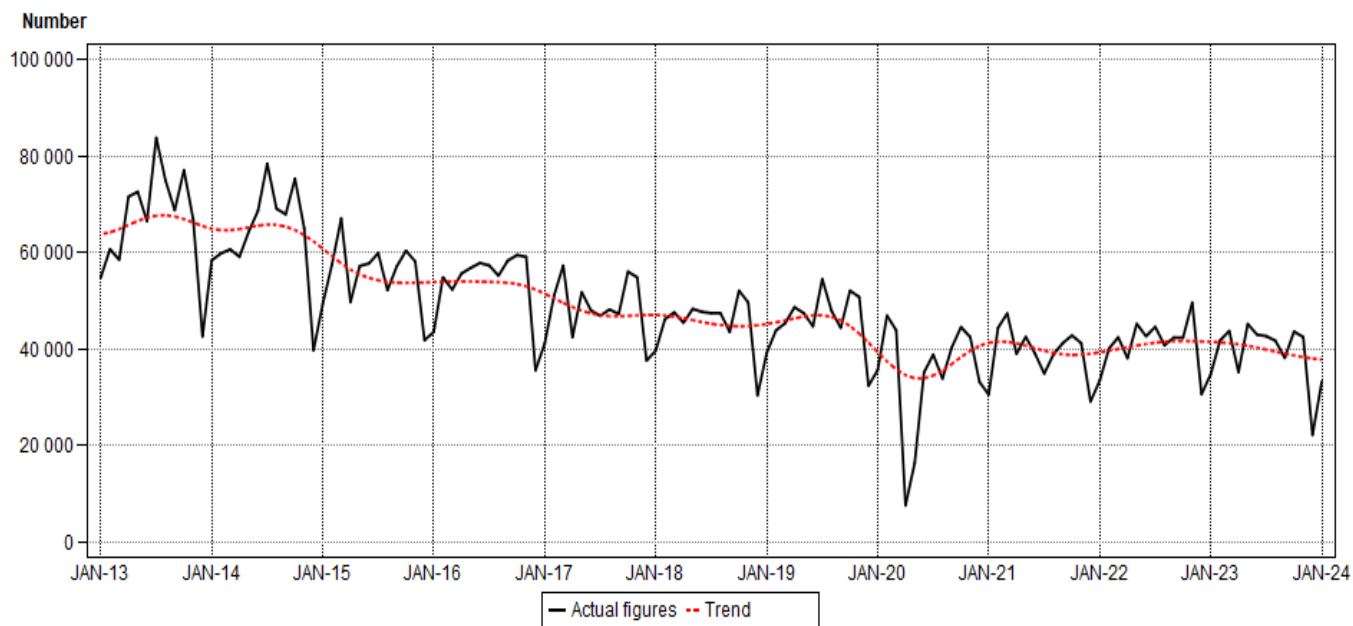
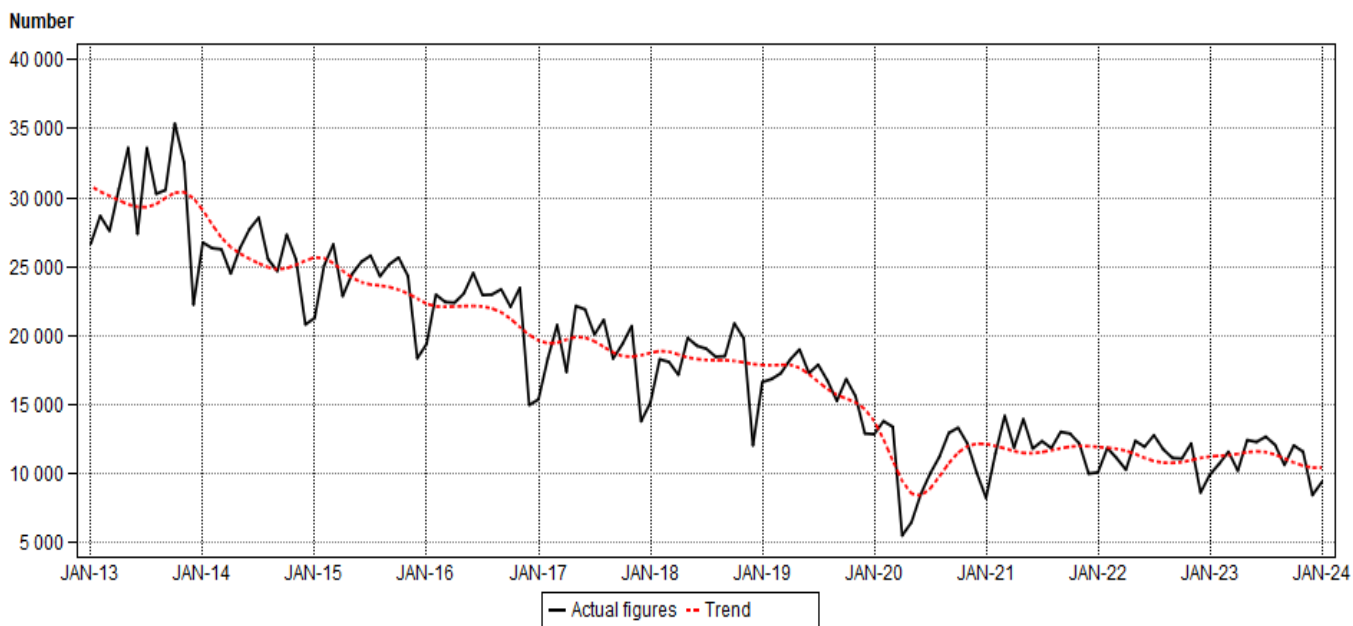


Figure 2 – Civil judgements recorded for debt



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	Jan-23	Dec-23 ¹	Jan-24 ¹	2023	Jan-23	Dec-23 ¹	Jan-24 ¹
Cases recorded	Actual figures	490 655	36 599	22 746	33 793	409 041	31 108	18 112	29 553
	Seasonally adjusted		44 376	39 119	37 708		37 489	32 538	32 318
Civil summonses for debt	Goods sold - Open account	19 893	1 208	1 163	1 083	11 927	697	657	564
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	13 520	1 626	820	808	10 473	1 465	617	617
	Services - Professional	61 260	4 242	2 790	3 139	44 560	3 474	1 937	2 305
	Services - Other	67 928	4 645	3 054	4 508	57 638	3 940	2 580	4 080
	Rent	24 109	1 874	1 503	1 206	16 557	1 294	856	847
	Money lent	105 107	8 952	5 086	6 144	97 553	8 437	4 587	5 518
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	43 594	2 742	1 865	1 932	39 607	2 557	1 603	1 721
	Other debts	139 114	9 492	5 869	14 366	122 541	8 505	4 882	13 387
	Total - Actual figures	474 525	34 781	22 150	33 186	400 856	30 369	17 719	29 039
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		42 543	37 736	37 414		36 746	31 759	32 254

¹ Preliminary.

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2023	Jan-23	Dec-23 ¹	Jan-24 ¹	2023	Jan-23	Dec-23 ¹	Jan-24 ¹
Number of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	6 569	494	407	553	3 398	213	241	273
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	3 053	202	210	214	2 376	158	168	164
	Services - Professional	22 620	1 809	1 260	1 813	16 987	1 521	894	1 400
	Services - Other	24 236	1 807	2 142	1 755	21 285	1 479	1 951	1 570
	Rent	10 708	734	681	707	7 908	490	528	521
	Money lent	29 247	2 329	1 664	1 856	26 674	2 148	1 535	1 713
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	11 634	672	682	805	9 986	637	548	750
	Other debts	25 980	1 831	1 347	1 624	21 394	1 646	1 094	1 461
	Total - Actual figures	134 047	9 878	8 393	9 327	110 008	8 292	6 959	7 852
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		11 485	12 588	9 900		9 519	10 816	8 105

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2023	Jan-23	Dec-23 ¹	Jan-24 ¹	2023	Jan-23	Dec-23 ¹	Jan-24 ¹
Value of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	162 493	11 572	9 316	12 891	52 463	3 912	4 043	4 989
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	95 057	4 449	6 789	7 893	73 549	3 229	5 501	5 223
	Services - Professional	275 554	18 250	15 861	20 869	161 863	10 848	7 411	13 971
	Services - Other	479 682	31 422	40 647	33 873	396 554	25 551	33 658	29 128
	Rent	361 144	22 124	24 804	26 565	256 500	15 416	17 274	17 597
	Money lent	1 068 083	69 948	63 110	68 476	1 010 531	67 441	60 931	66 253
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	448 744	27 755	30 596	42 223	398 584	26 364	23 427	38 554
	Other debts	733 267	42 161	46 778	56 451	592 177	35 864	35 612	51 355
	Total - Actual figures	3 624 024	227 681	237 901	269 241	2 942 221	188 625	187 857	227 070
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		284 745	309 659	315 826		234 217	247 144	258 909

¹ Preliminary.

Table 4 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between the three months ended January 2023 and the three months ended January 2024

Actual estimates	Actual estimates Nov 2022 – Jan 2023	Actual estimates Nov 2023 – Jan 2024	% change between Nov 2022 – Jan 2023 and Nov 2023 – Jan 2024	Difference between Nov 2022 – Jan 2023 and Nov 2023 – Jan 2024
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	115 037	97 824	-15,0	-17 213
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	30 590	29 263	-4,3	-1 327
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	775,3	846,9	9,2	71,6

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 three months ended January 2023 and the three months ended January 2024 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	-0,3	0,1	-0,4
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	-1,0	-0,1	0,1
Services - Professional	-2,0	0,4	2,1
Services - Other	-2,4	1,0	3,0
Rent	-1,3	0,9	2,5
Money lent	-7,8	-5,0	-3,2
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-1,6	-0,9	2,4
Other debts	1,4	-0,8	2,7
Total	-15,0	-4,3	9,2

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 November 2022 to January 2023, 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 January 2023	Actual estimates January 2024	% change between January 2023 and January 2024	Difference between January 2023 and January 2024
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	34 781	33 186	-4,6	-1 595
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	9 878	9 327	-5,6	-551
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	227,7	269,2	18,3	41,5

Table 7 – 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	
2023	Jan	5 929	2 289	226	2 239	7 652	2 000	10 458	2 414	1 574	34 781
	Feb	8 085	3 583	535	2 663	7 860	1 803	13 088	2 454	1 687	41 758
	Mar	10 472	3 326	577	2 070	7 387	1 940	13 736	2 579	1 679	43 766
	Apr	8 307	2 722	286	1 353	6 537	1 437	11 143	1 836	1 583	35 204
	May	10 243	2 775	577	1 812	8 030	1 883	15 079	3 010	1 805	45 214
	Jun	10 394	2 649	373	2 258	6 827	1 660	14 099	2 747	1 982	42 989
	Jul	9 434	2 643	545	2 623	6 117	1 691	14 552	3 249	1 830	42 684
	Aug	9 672	2 217	488	2 275	6 966	1 740	13 540	3 103	1 702	41 703
	Sep	8 565	1 954	544	2 172	6 391	1 573	12 903	2 277	1 792	38 171
	Oct	9 744	2 758	438	2 630	7 032	1 927	14 103	2 947	2 038	43 617
	Nov	10 585	2 856	403	2 418	6 644	1 625	14 280	1 954	1 723	42 488
Dec	5 298	1 862	296	1 212	3 953	777	5 718	1 736	1 298	22 150	
2024	Jan	12 156	2 125	447	1 170	4 436	1 349	8 256	1 601	1 646	33 186

¹ Latest three months are preliminary.**Table 8 – 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	
2023	Jan	1 739	1 044	139	849	1 057	384	2 130	1 521	1 015	9 878
	Feb	2 557	1 245	184	826	1 518	359	2 106	760	1 109	10 664
	Mar	2 326	1 120	175	622	1 352	671	3 061	1 043	1 169	11 539
	Apr	2 224	1 046	186	722	1 104	379	2 719	707	1 073	10 160
	May	2 995	993	201	1 229	1 176	353	3 488	746	1 206	12 387
	Jun	2 747	874	195	1 401	1 118	624	3 116	976	1 202	12 253
	Jul	2 599	740	209	1 069	1 039	549	4 030	1 260	1 136	12 631
	Aug	2 673	701	198	746	1 405	510	3 152	1 477	1 171	12 033
	Sep	2 581	650	141	755	1 028	600	2 763	880	1 175	10 573
	Oct	2 556	786	134	860	1 158	527	3 347	1 356	1 269	11 993
	Nov	2 476	877	115	877	931	399	3 577	1 049	1 242	11 543
Dec	1 704	621	130	505	867	385	2 597	492	1 092	8 393	
2024	Jan	1 827	793	89	478	823	406	2 868	855	1 188	9 327

¹ Latest three months are preliminary.**Table 9 – 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	
2023	Jan	48 201	23 145	2 715	17 834	41 083	6 105	59 324	24 540	4 736	227 681
	Feb	71 239	26 228	2 548	20 787	55 818	6 367	78 357	15 896	7 331	284 572
	Mar	61 558	24 352	2 314	12 695	61 358	15 708	91 994	16 891	9 394	296 265
	Apr	74 130	27 959	2 422	17 584	39 905	12 650	65 687	15 301	7 228	262 865
	May	96 915	32 086	3 204	22 883	50 094	6 182	95 649	21 852	11 895	340 761
	Jun	87 902	24 636	3 690	26 244	46 216	11 052	90 188	25 969	10 839	326 736
	Jul	80 322	25 666	3 902	23 351	42 213	11 147	111 543	29 700	9 197	337 041
	Aug	78 292	24 411	3 360	15 779	55 587	10 376	106 620	25 324	9 999	329 748
	Sep	71 846	21 282	2 393	15 384	42 508	11 085	120 205	18 895	10 203	313 803
	Oct	67 768	18 705	2 433	15 977	56 642	12 759	118 072	21 213	13 369	326 938
	Nov	77 605	24 067	2 049	21 211	32 732	7 444	140 526	22 692	11 387	339 713
Dec	44 935	14 115	1 965	9 298	33 139	11 168	102 153	13 283	7 845	237 901	
2024	Jan	55 396	23 742	1 724	13 722	43 088	6 545	96 160	18 821	10 044	269 241

¹ Latest three months are preliminary.

Analysis of revisions

Introduction

Preliminary monthly numbers of civil judgements recorded for debt are published approximately seven weeks after the reference month, e.g. preliminary numbers of civil judgements recorded for debt for June are published around mid-August. The preliminary values are revised over the following three months, using additional information received from respondents.

Note that seasonally adjusted values are revised monthly.

Analysis

Revisions may be analysed in terms of several dimensions, namely numbers and/or rand values and/or growth rates (e.g. month-on-month percentage changes, year-on-year percentage changes); seasonally adjusted and/or unadjusted data; totals and/or components; preliminary estimate compared with first revision and/or latest available revision; and various combinations of these options.

This analysis is confined to the following:

- Total number of civil judgements recorded for debt, year-on-year growth rate, unadjusted.
- Preliminary growth rates are compared with the latest available revised growth rates, where the preliminary growth rate refers to the first year-on-year growth rate published for the month in question.
- Time period: January 2012 to December 2023.

Figure 3 shows the preliminary and revised growth rates (line chart, left vertical axis) and the difference between them (bar chart, right vertical axis, where difference = revised - preliminary).

Table 10 provides key results relating to revisions.

Figure 3 – Civil judgements recorded for debt year-on-year growth rates: preliminary and revised

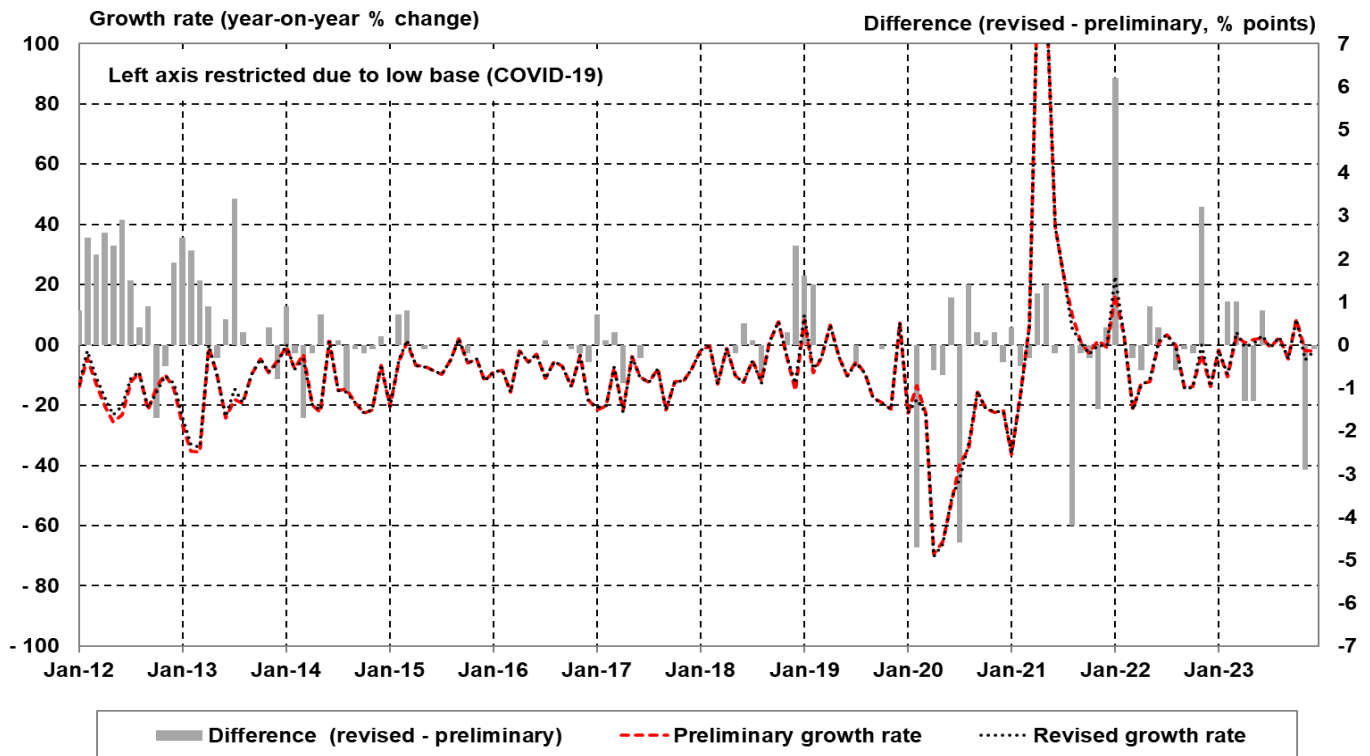


Table 10 – Civil judgements recorded for debt year-on-year growth rates: preliminary and revised

Description	Value / outcome	Comment
Average year-on-year growth rate over the whole period	Preliminary: -8,62% Revised: -8,45%	The average of revised growth rates is slightly higher than the average of preliminary growth rates
Mean revision	0,17 of a percentage point	This is the average of the revisions
Mean absolute revision	0,67 of a percentage point	Average of the revisions, but based on the absolute value of each revision (positives and negatives do not cancel each other)
Largest upward revision	6,2 percentage points	Preliminary 16,5% was revised up to 22,7% (January 2022)
Largest downward revision	-4,7 percentage points	Preliminary -13,5% was revised down to -18,2% (February 2020)
Range for all revisions	-4,7 to 6,2 percentage points	
Range within which 90% of the revisions lie	-1,5 to 2,5 percentage points	This may be regarded as the normal range for revisions, with revisions outside this range being outliers
Number of upward revisions	51 (or 35,4% of the total observations)	
Number of downward revisions	43 (or 29,9% of the total observations)	
Number of zero revisions	50 (or 34,7% of the total observations)	
Is the mean revision (0,17) significantly different from zero?	No	This indicates that there is no bias in the preliminary estimate – see Note 1
Standard deviation of the revisions	1,25 percentage points	Standard deviation is a measure of dispersion about the mean – see the row below
Percentage of revisions that lie within one standard deviation of the mean	84,7%	This is the percentage of revisions that lie between -1,07 and 1,42 percentage points; the higher the percentage, the lower is the dispersion about the mean – see Figure 4

Note 1: Is the mean revision significantly different from zero?

The formula for the test statistic is as follows:

$$\text{test statistic} = \frac{\bar{R}}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{1}{n(n-1)}\right) \left(\sum_{t=1}^n \hat{\epsilon}_t^2 + \frac{3}{4} \sum_{t=2}^n \hat{\epsilon}_t \hat{\epsilon}_{t-1} + \frac{2}{3} \sum_{t=3}^n \hat{\epsilon}_t \hat{\epsilon}_{t-2}\right)}}$$

where

n = number of observations

\bar{R} = mean revision

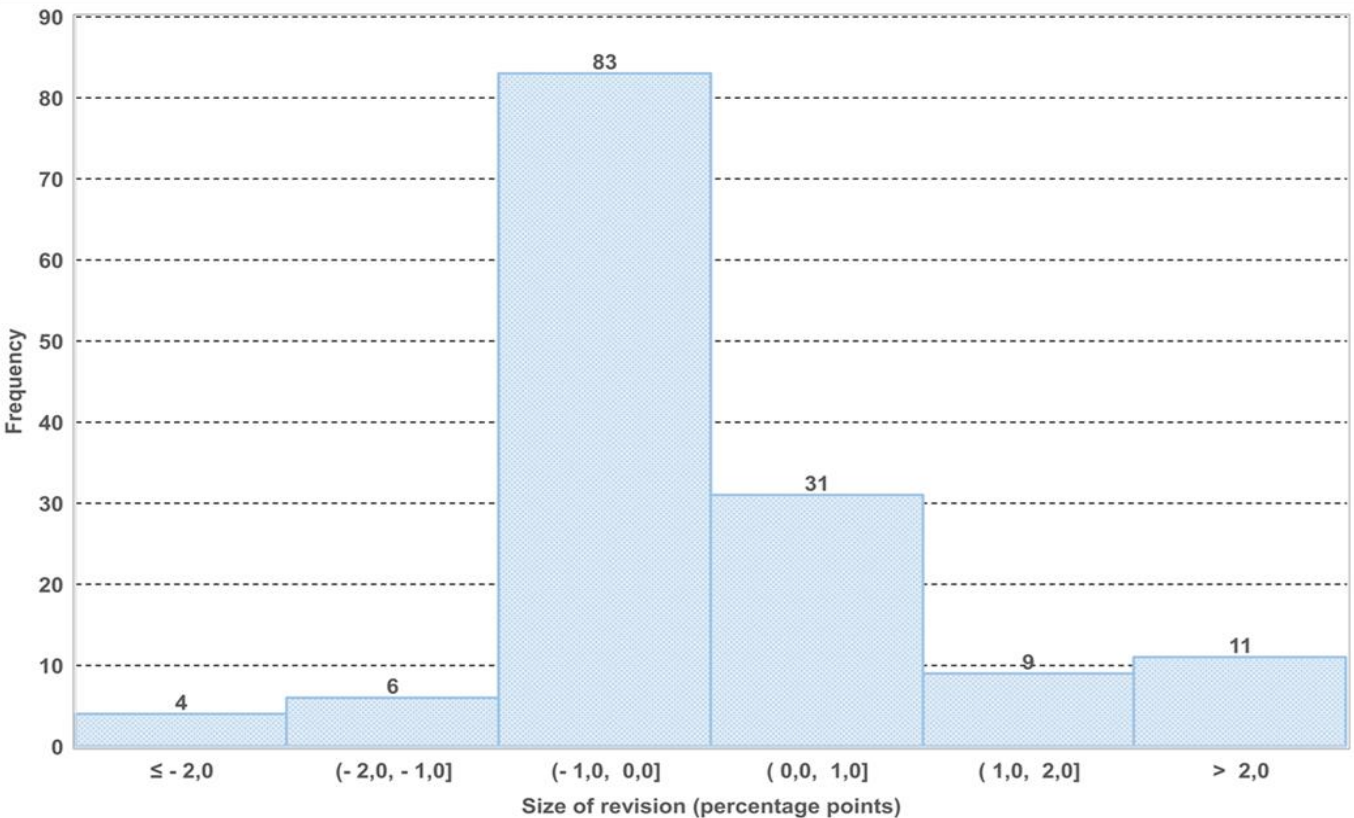
$\hat{\epsilon}_t = R_t - \bar{R}$, with R_t = revision in period t

Note that if the test statistic shows that the mean revision (MR) is significantly different from zero, then there is bias in the preliminary estimates. Bias in a series suggests there is scope to enhance the compilation of that series in an attempt to remove or minimise the bias. $MR > 0$ (statistically significant) implies under-estimation of the preliminary estimates. $MR < 0$ (statistically significant) implies over-estimation of the preliminary estimates.

In this case the test statistic is 1,50, which lies below the critical value of 1,98, indicating that the MR is not significantly different from zero at a 5% significance level. Accordingly, no bias is detected in the preliminary estimates.

Figure 4 shows the revisions in terms of a histogram. There were 83 revisions between -1,0 and 0,0 ($-1,0 < \text{revision} \leq 0,0$) and 31 revisions between 0,0 and 1,0 ($0,0 < \text{revision} \leq 1,0$). Around 79,2% of revisions lie between -1,0 and 1,0 percentage point.

Figure 4 – Civil judgements recorded for debt year-on-year growth rates: histogram of revisions



Explanatory notes

Introduction	1	Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) conducts a monthly survey of civil cases recorded and civil summonses for debt issued in South Africa. This information is obtained from selected magistrates' offices.
	2	Except for cases recorded, all other information relates to debt cases only, therefore claims for damages, ejectment orders and other non-debt cases are excluded.
Purpose of the survey	3	The survey of civil cases for debt covers selected 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.
Scope of the survey	4	This survey covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of civil cases recorded; • number of civil summonses issued for debt; • number of civil judgements recorded for debt; and • value of civil judgements recorded for debt.
Statistical unit	5	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.
Survey methodology and design	6	The survey is conducted by email, fax and telephone each month from 203 magistrates' offices.
Collection rate	7	The preliminary collection rate for the civil cases for debt survey for January 2024 was 81,3%. The improved collection rate for December 2023 was 82,8%.
Rounding-off of figures	8	Where figures have been rounded off, discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and the totals.
Seasonal adjustment	9	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: Click to download seasonal adjustment for civil cases for debt February 2022.
Trend cycle	10	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.
Unpublished statistics	11	In some cases, Stats SA can also make available statistics which are not published.
Symbols and abbreviations	12	R/D Refer to drawer Stats SA Statistics South Africa * Revised figures

Glossary

Acknowledgement of debt	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.
Bills	Bills are statements of charges for services rendered or for amounts owed.
Cases recorded	Includes civil debt and non-debt cases recorded.
Civil judgements	Civil judgements are decisions taken in a civil matter or a dispute between two people or parties.
Civil summonses	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.
Consent judgements	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.
Default judgements	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.
Instalment sale transaction	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.
Litigants	Litigants are people who take part in court proceedings, usually against each other, like a debtor and a creditor.
Litigants referred	Litigants referred relates to a case where the parties have been referred to another instance/court.
Open account transaction	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.
Other services	Other services refer to municipal services (except outstanding assessment rates), plumbers, builders, mechanics, panel beaters and electricians.
Other debts	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.
Plaintiff	Plaintiff is a person/party in a civil case who asks the court for judgement against another person.
Professional services	Professional services refer to medical doctors, dentists, advocates, attorneys, auditors, accountants, architects, engineers, hospital services, etc.
Promissory note	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.
Reference month	Reference month refers to one calendar month.
Refer to drawer (R/D) cheques	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

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