

P0041

Statistics of civil cases for debt

March 2002

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Key figures for the month ended March 2002

Actual estimates	March 2002	% change between March 2001 and March 2002	% change between January 2001 to March 2001 and January 2002 to March 2002
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	128 407	-13,4	-5,0
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	76 677	-6,1	-12,7
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	669,3	-26,0	-8,4

Seasonally adjusted estimates	March 2002	% change between February 2002 and March 2002	% change between October 2001 to December 2001 and January 2001 to March 2002
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	118 778	-3,6	-1,8
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	74 825	-1,9	-6,7
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	586,3	-37,7	-7,3

Key findings as at the end of March 2002

The total number of civil summonses for debt decreases

The total number of civil summonses issued for debt for the first quarter of 2002, after seasonal adjustment, decreased by 1,8% compared with the fourth quarter of 2001. Furthermore, the total number of civil summonses issued for debt for the first quarter of 2002 decreased by 5,0% compared with the first quarter of 2001.

The major contributors to the decrease of 5,0% in civil summonses issued for debt for the first quarter of 2002 compared with the first quarter of 2001 were civil summonses issued in respect of 'other' services (-3,8 percentage points), goods sold on account (-2,1 percentage points), professional services (-0,9 percentage point), rent (-0,8 of a percentage point) and promissory notes (-0,5 of a percentage point). However, these decreases were partially counteracted by an increase in summonses issued for debt relating to money lent (+3,8 percentage points).

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt decreases

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt for the first quarter of 2002, after seasonal adjustment, decreased by 6,7% compared with the fourth quarter of 2001. Furthermore, the total number of civil judgements recorded for debt for the first quarter of 2002 decreased by 12,7% compared with the first quarter of 2001.

The major contributors to the decrease of 12,7% in the number of civil judgements recorded for debt for the first quarter of 2002 compared with the first quarter of 2001 were civil judgements recorded in respect of 'other' debt (-6,4 percentage points) and 'other' services (-6,1 percentage points).

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt decreases

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt for the first quarter of 2002, after seasonal adjustment, decreased by 7,3% compared with the fourth quarter of 2001. Furthermore, the total value of civil judgements recorded for debt for the first quarter of 2002 decreased by 8,4% compared with the first quarter of 2001.

The major contributor to the decrease of 8,4% in the value of civil judgements recorded for debt for the first quarter of 2002 compared with the first quarter of 2001 was civil judgements recorded in respect of 'other' debts (-20,4 percentage points). However, this decrease was partially counteracted by increases in civil judgements relating to money lent (+9,1 percentage points), 'other' services (+1,6 percentage points) and goods sold on account (+1,5 percentage points).

During March 2002, 76 677 civil judgements for debt amounted to R669,3 million. The largest contributors to the R669,3 million were civil judgements relating to money lent (38,4% or R257,2 million) and 'other' debts (29,6% or R198,0 million).

Notes

Forthcoming issues

Issue

Expected release date

April 2002	20 June 2002
May 2002	25 July 2002
June 2002	22 August 2002
July 2002	26 September 2002
August 2002	24 October 2002
September 2002	21 November 2002
October 2002	19 December 2002
November 2002	15 January 2003
December 2002	19 February 2003

Purpose of the survey

The survey of Civil Cases for Debt covering a sample of magistrates' offices in South Africa excluding the former Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC states). These 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.

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Additional information

Explanatory Notes

Introduction

- 1 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.
- 2 This statistical release reflects a sample of all civil cases recorded and summonses issued against business enterprises and private persons in selected magistrates' offices.
- 3 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.

Scope of the survey

- 4 This survey covers:
 - Number of civil cases recorded.
 - Number of civil summonses for debt issued.
 - Number of civil judgements for debt.
 - Value of civil judgements for debt.
- 5 Small claims courts serve as a forum for the adjudication of money claims against individuals or firms. It is for use by the general public only and not for business enterprises.

6

The following actions are excluded from the jurisdiction of small claims courts -

- claims exceeding R3 000 in value;
- claims against the state;
- claims based on cession or the transfer of rights;
- claims for damages in respect of defamation, malicious prosecution, wrongful imprisonment, wrongful arrest, seduction and breach of promise to marry;
- claims for the dissolution of a marriage;
- claims concerning the validity of a will;
- claims concerning the status of a person in respect of his mental capacity; and
- claims in which the performance in accordance with a contract is sought, without an alternative claim for payment of damages, except in the case of a claim for rendering an account or transferring movable or immovable property not exceeding R3 000 in value.

Comparability

- 7 The information in respect of magistrates' courts shown in this statistical release refers to debt cases only and is therefore not strictly comparable with the information shown for the small claims courts.
- 8 The jurisdiction limit for civil cases handled by magistrates' offices (R20 000 for liquid assets and R50 000 for non-liquid assets) was increased to R100 000 as from 1 July 1995. A comparison with the period prior to July 1995 must thus be handled with circumspection.

Statistical unit	<p>9 The statistical unit for collection of information is a magistrate's office. Magistrate's offices include the small claims courts.</p> <p>10 The largest magistrates offices in South Africa which account for approximately 95% of all the civil cases in South Africa are included in the monthly sample survey of civil cases recorded and civil summonses for debt issued. The smallest magistrates' offices are not used in the sample. A sample of 152 magistrates offices is drawn using only the number of civil cases recorded as the measure of size.</p>
Survey methodology and design	<p>6 The survey is conducted by mail each month from approximately 152 magistrates' offices.</p>
Seasonal adjustment	<p>12 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. This means the month-to-month movements of seasonally adjusted estimates may not be reliable indicators of trend behaviour.</p>
Trend cycle	<p>13 Smoothed seasonally adjusted estimates are generated using the X-11 Seasonal Adjustment Programme.</p>
Publications	<p>14 Users may also wish to refer to the following publications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulletin of Statistics issued quarterly. • SA Statistics issued annually.
Unpublished statistics	<p>15 In some cases Stats SA can also make available statistics which are not published. The statistics can be made available in one or more of the following ways: computer printout, CD or diskette. Generally a charge is made for providing unpublished statistics.</p>
Symbols and abbreviations	<p>16 R/D Refer to Drawer CD Compact Disc Stats SA Statistics South Africa TBVC Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei.</p>
Technical notes	
Response rates	<p>The response rate for March was 88,7%</p>

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.
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 a debt he owes without defending the action. This usually happens before the debtor signs a binding contract, e.g. a loan agreement.
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.
Hearings	Hearings are proceedings in a court where the court listens or hears the submission or presentation in support of their cases where the two parties submitted the evidence in support of their cases.
Instalment sale transactions	Instalment sale transactions 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” refers to municipal services (except outstanding assessment rates), plumbers, builders, mechanics, panel-beaters and electricians.
Other kinds of debt	“Other kinds of debts” refers to outstanding salaries and wages, outstanding medical fund debts, outstanding sponsored debts, outstanding class and tuition debt, outstanding income and sales tax, outstanding assessment rates, outstanding money in respect of television maintenance contracts and outstanding money in respect of flat levies.
Plaintiff	Plaintiff is a person/party in a civil case who asks the court for judgement against another person.
Promissory note	Promissory notes are written notes, signed by one person, in which he promises 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

RD Cheques refer to dishonoured cheques. The drawer is the owner of the cheque.

(RD) cheques

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.

Small claims courts

Small claims courts refer to courts where claims of R3 000 or less are heard. The presiding officer in these courts is called the commissioner. Litigants in the small claims courts do not have to make use of legal representatives.

For more 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 eleven 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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Table 1 - Number of civil cases recorded and summonses issued for debt according to business enterprises and private persons

Item	Business enterprises and private persons				Private persons			
	2001	2001	2002	2002	2001	2001	2002	2002
		Mar.	Feb.	Mar.		Mar.	Feb.	Mar.
Number								
1. Cases recorded								
1.1 Actual figures	1 813 654	170 966	142 426	141 612	1 655 837	157 159	130 049	129 610
1.2 Seasonally adjusted		157 313	137 940	130 821		144 375	127 012	119 617
2. Civil summonses for debt								
2.1 Goods sold								
2.1.1 Open account	248 080	23 465	18 518	17 122	221 283	20 977	16 503	15 466
2.1.2 Instalment sale transactions	45 565	4 665	3 759	3 565	41 154	4 308	3 472	3 190
2.2 Services								
2.2.1 Professional	167 898	15 510	13 344	12 876	160 340	14 867	12 705	12 327
2.2.2 Other	322 400	31 549	23 640	26 464	301 137	29 337	22 215	25 078
2.3 Rent	82 665	9 950	6 117	6 153	66 000	8 367	4 603	4 813
2.4 Money lent	351 681	30 430	32 808	33 075	335 566	29 112	31 744	31 815
2.5 Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	111 152	10 622	9 117	9 309	95 936	9 166	8 248	8 427
2.6 Other	234 135	22 089	19 869	19 843	209 683	20 074	17 154	16 800
2.7 Total								
2.7.1 Actual figures	1 563 576	148 280	127 172	128 407	1 431 098	136 209	116 643	117 917
2.7.2 Seasonally adjusted		135 662	123 180	118 778		125 351	113 686	108 829

Table 2 - The number of civil cases recorded in selected magistrates' offices

Year or month	Cape Peninsula	Port Elizabeth	East-London	Kimberley	Pieter-maritzburg	Durban	Johannesburg	East Rand	West Rand	Pretoria	Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark	Bloemfontein
2000	216 481	116 963	36 979	17 474	35 897	115 562	113 989	94 347	44 280	134 031	44 545	33 581
2001	200 575	126 257	30 998	19 520	42 098	109 605	116 694	85 965	43 278	186 626	38 956	48 186
2001 - J	12 891	9 509	1 938	1 442	3 771	6 484	7 216	7 507	3 341	11 824	3 766	6 619
F	16 231	8 948	6 556	1 035	3 877	10 829	10 785	8 718	3 704	14 951	2 813	6 619
M	23 003	10 380	3 444	1 791	3 911	10 800	12 462	8 077	3 379	16 437	2 727	1 722
A	19 119	13 057	1 708	1 842	3 300	9 504	11 320	6 134	3 220	13 222	2 261	2 636
M	21 742	12 519	3 606	1 370	4 370	9 582	11 733	8 159	4 194	19 208	2 754	2 672
J	18 385	10 095	2 367	2 028	4 646	9 000	10 826	8 252	4 067	15 049	2 277	920
J	16 644	12 649	2 139	1 657	3 721	7 614	9 282	7 352	3 405	13 749	5 577	2 763
A	16 885	10 208	1 903	1 297	3 946	9 396	10 649	6 203	3 542	11 214	6 587	4 352
S	13 065	10 443	1 775	1 957	2 410	7 270	8 720	5 032	3 550	9 986	2 337	2 596
O	15 149	12 793	2 182	1 722	3 082	10 130	8 720	7 559	3 270	15 285	2 922	2 709
N	15 508	11 184	2 225	1 722	3 315	11 873	8 720	7 007	5 306	27 118	2 894	6 617
D	11 953	4 472	1 155	1 657	1 749	7 123	6 261	5 965	2 300	18 583	2 041	7 961
2002 - J	12 399	9 395	1 684	1 657	2 947	6 618	10 413	5 931	3 111	13 571	1 503	2 627
F	12 156	10 065	1 899	769	3 301	13 463	10 413	6 028	3 003	12 691	1 858	2 939
M	15 356	9 855	2 118	3 325	3 393	9 628	11 519	5 327	3 371	12 756	1 751	2 939

Table 3 - Number of civil default and consent judgements for debt according to business enterprises and private persons

Item	Business enterprises and private persons				Private persons			
	2001	2001	2002	2002	2001	2001	2002	2002
		Mar.	Feb.	Mar.		Mar.	Feb.	Mar.
1. Judgements								
1.1 Goods sold								
1.1.1 Open account	133 233	9 368	10 006	10 558	122 089	8 610	9 150	9 856
1.1.2 Instalment sale transactions	19 342	1 333	1 479	2 511	17 157	1 142	1 345	2 373
1.2 Services								
1.2.1 Professional	102 587	6 491	6 275	6 677	98 859	6 199	5 995	6 522
1.2.2 Other	159 631	12 762	9 278	9 382	151 104	11 990	8 853	8 914
1.3 Rent	46 551	3 520	4 228	3 377	38 495	2 766	3 501	2 716
1.4 Money lent	310 569	24 922	27 490	27 418	303 382	24 256	26 973	26 973
1.5 Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	85 482	6 845	6 194	7 266	79 025	6 442	5 871	7 089
1.6 Other	152 749	16 386	10 113	9 488	142 434	15 690	8 501	8 698
1.7 Total								
1.7.1 Actual figures	1 010 144	81 627	75 063	76 676	952 545	77 094	70 190	73 142
1.7.2 Seasonally adjusted		79 284	76 288	74 825		74 851	72 269	71 243

Table 4 - Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt according to business enterprises and private persons

Item	Business enterprises and private persons				Private persons			
	2001	2001	2002	2002	2001	2001	2002	2002
		Mar.	Feb.	Mar.		Mar.	Feb.	Mar.
	R1 000							
1. Judgements								
1.1 Goods sold								
1.1.1 Open account	1 025 789	75 565	113 225	50 419	848 081	53 788	100 862	39 769
1.1.2 Instalment sale transactions	353 756	36 811	32 067	24 105	286 119	29 201	26 245	20 600
1.2 Services								
1.2.1 Professional	218 869	16 673	16 042	14 679	200 675	15 263	13 627	13 136
1.2.2 Other	770 697	70 527	70 243	42 972	693 405	63 456	64 419	38 465
1.3 Rent	346 812	29 461	22 180	25 360	247 981	19 609	17 200	15 190
1.4 Money lent	2 954 066	294 456	511 911	257 176	2 742 300	278 433	502 073	248 151
1.5 Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	761 520	51 094	50 705	56 620	625 223	34 536	44 378	52 129
1.6 Other	2 729 738	330 525	179 504	198 006	2 080 050	254 061	86 650	92 691
1.7 Total								
1.7.1 Actual figures	9 161 247	905 112	995 877	669 337	7 723 837	748 347	855 454	520 131
1.7.2 Seasonally adjusted		796 719	940 720	586 324		654 196	828 642	451 491

Table 5 - Number of small claims courts, litigants referred, summonses issued and hearings: 1990 to 1999

Year	Small claims courts	Litigants referred	Summonses issued	Hearings
1990	92	16 474	16 551	15 540
1991	103	16 857	19 520	17 814
1992	106	18 906	24 942	23 421
1993	109	19 502	24 929	23 953
1994	111	20 101	25 112	25 356
1995	113	20 154	24 905	25 746
1996	120	21 230	27 463	27 690
1997	115	13 423	25 417	26 622
1998	121	22 546	28 622	27 672
1999	127	34 897	30 592	30 651

Source: Department of Justice