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Statistics of civil cases for debt (Preliminary)

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Contents

Key results for March 2024 **2**

 Table A – Key figures for the month of March 2024 2

 Figure 1 – Civil summonses issued for debt 3

 Figure 2 – Civil judgements recorded for debt 3

Detailed results: Tables **4**

 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 first quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024 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 first quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024 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

 Table 7 – Number of civil summonses issued for debt by province 7

 Table 8 – Number of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province 7

 Table 9 – Value of civil default and consent judgements for debt by province (R'000)..... 7

Explanatory notes **8**

Glossary **9**

General information **10**

Technical enquiries **10**

Key results for March 2024

Table A – Key figures for the month of March 2024

Actual estimates	Mar 2024	% change between Mar 2023 and Mar 2024	% change between Jan – Mar 2023 and Jan – Mar 2024
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	36 276	-17,1	-12,1
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	11 015	-4,5	-2,4
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	273,1	-7,8	4,3

The number of civil summonses issued for debt

The total number of civil summonses issued for debt decreased by 12,1% in the first quarter of 2024 compared with the first quarter of 2023.

The largest negative contributors to the 12,1% decrease in civil summonses issued were:

- money lent (contributing -8,3 percentage points);
- services (contributing -3,3 percentage points); and
- promissory notes (contributing -2,2 percentage points).

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

The number of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt decreased by 2,4% in the first quarter of 2024 compared with the first quarter of 2023.

The largest negative contributors to the 2,4% decrease were civil judgements relating to:

- money lent (contributing -4,1 percentage points);
- 'other' debts (contributing -1,7 percentage points); and
- promissory notes (contributing -1,1 percentage points).

Services was the largest positive contributor (contributing 3,8 percentage points) – see Table 5.

The value of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt increased by 4,3% in the first quarter of 2024 compared with the first quarter of 2023.

The largest positive contributors to the 4,3% increase were civil judgements relating to:

- services (contributing 3,4 percentage points);
- 'other' debts (contributing 1,8 percentage points);
- rent (contributing 1,5 percentage points); and
- promissory notes (contributing 1,4 percentage points).

Money lent was the only negative contributor (contributing -3,9 percentage points) – see Table 5.

In March 2024, 11 015 civil judgements for debt amounting to R273,1 million were recorded. The largest contributors to the total value of judgements were:

- services (R62,5 million or 22,9%);
- money lent (R57,1 million or 20,9%); and
- 'other' debts (R55,6 million or 20,4%) – see Tables 2 and 3.

Figure 1 – Civil summonses issued for debt

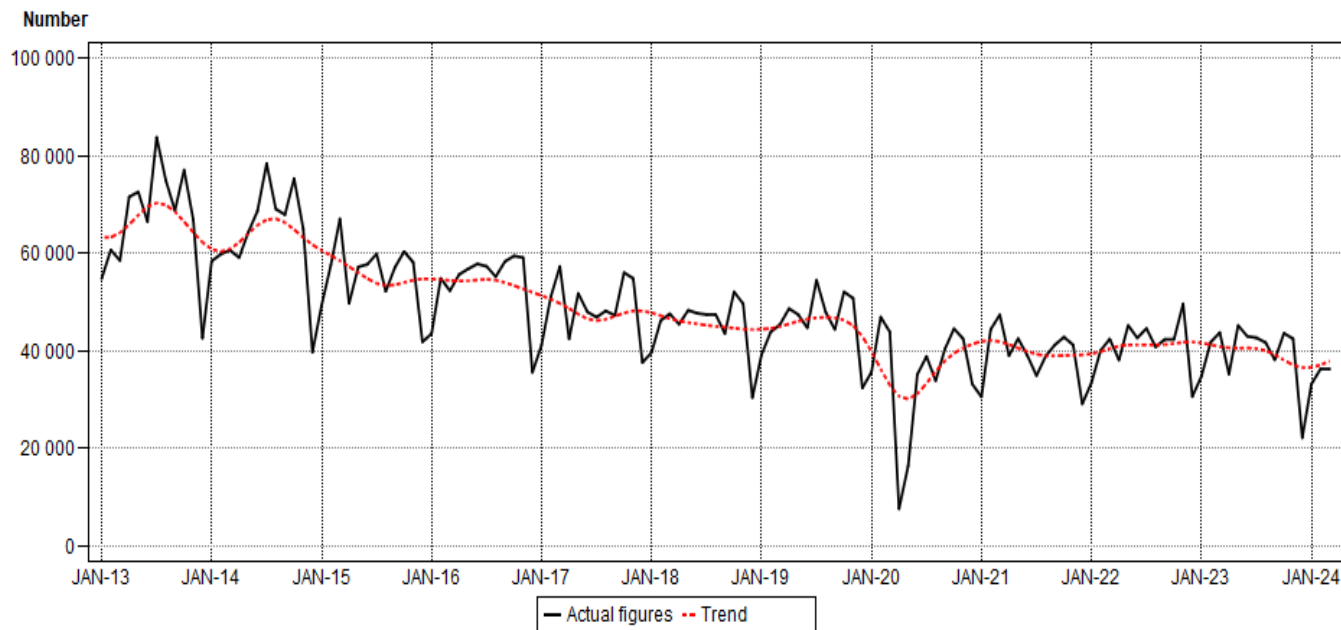
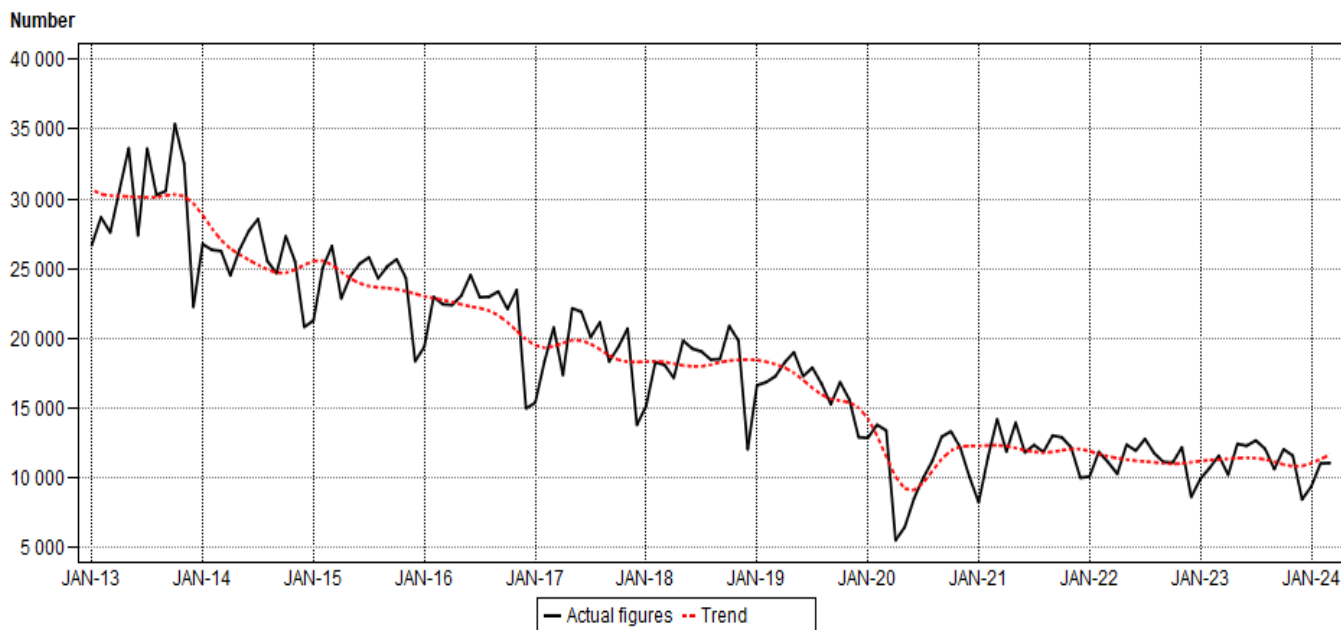


Figure 2 – Civil judgements recorded for debt




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	Mar-23	Feb-24 ¹	Mar-24 ¹	2023	Mar-23	Feb-24 ¹	Mar-24 ¹
Cases recorded	Actual figures	490 651	46 158	36 987	37 913	409 038	39 361	31 753	32 347
	Seasonally adjusted		42 604	35 797	41 877		35 830	31 289	35 392
Civil summonses for debt	Goods sold - Open account	19 892	1 740	1 434	1 509	11 927	1 113	862	871
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	13 520	1 107	1 055	960	10 473	905	847	724
	Services - Professional	61 258	5 210	4 115	4 194	44 558	4 200	3 012	3 239
	Services - Other	67 928	6 399	5 709	6 068	57 638	5 508	5 129	5 341
	Rent	24 109	2 257	1 997	1 882	16 557	1 611	1 420	1 346
	Money lent	105 109	10 440	6 772	6 686	97 555	9 898	6 357	6 113
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	43 594	3 922	3 378	2 234	39 607	3 627	3 072	2 044
	Other debts	139 111	12 691	11 834	12 743	122 538	11 366	10 411	11 503
	Total - Actual figures	474 521	43 766	36 294	36 276	400 853	38 228	31 110	31 181
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		40 667	34 748	40 202		35 125	29 548	34 244

¹ Preliminary.

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2023	Mar-23	Feb-24 ¹	Mar-24 ¹	2023	Mar-23	Feb-24 ¹	Mar-24 ¹
Number of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	6 570	568	482	467	3 399	348	270	266
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	3 053	285	203	277	2 376	230	157	230
	Services - Professional	22 620	1 847	1 912	2 047	16 987	1 403	1 344	1 437
	Services - Other	24 236	1 986	2 362	2 043	21 285	1 784	2 166	1 860
	Rent	10 708	853	948	1 131	7 908	663	742	895
	Money lent	29 247	2 756	2 297	2 187	26 674	2 531	2 081	1 893
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	11 634	960	725	983	9 986	829	683	933
	Other debts	25 983	2 284	2 049	1 880	21 397	1 882	1 856	1 696
	Total - Actual figures	134 051	11 539	10 978	11 015	110 012	9 670	9 299	9 210
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		11 314	10 728	12 399		9 256	8 972	10 107

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2023	Mar-23	Feb-24 ¹	Mar-24 ¹	2023	Mar-23	Feb-24 ¹	Mar-24 ¹
Value of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	162 658	15 364	13 162	14 781	52 628	4 846	4 149	6 172
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	95 057	8 048	6 094	9 497	73 549	6 639	4 371	7 895
	Services - Professional	275 554	19 947	21 418	23 952	161 863	13 861	13 385	15 538
	Services - Other	479 682	34 411	44 963	38 577	396 554	28 407	38 481	32 673
	Rent	361 144	25 972	31 703	35 097	256 500	17 496	25 679	27 995
	Money lent	1 068 083	87 599	86 902	57 056	1 010 531	84 342	81 948	55 709
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	448 744	35 905	35 519	38 509	398 584	31 662	31 614	36 679
	Other debts	733 385	69 019	60 924	55 596	592 296	54 979	56 451	48 855
	Total - Actual figures	3 624 307	296 265	300 685	273 065	2 942 505	242 232	256 078	231 516
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		292 088	309 948	315 419		241 736	265 202	262 860

¹ Preliminary.

Table 4 – Percentage change in the total number of civil summonses and judgements and the value of judgements recorded between the first quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024

Actual estimates	Actual estimates Jan – Mar 2023	Actual estimates Jan – Mar 2024	% change between Jan – Mar 2023 and Jan – Mar 2024	Difference between Jan – Mar 2023 and Jan – Mar 2024
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	120 305	105 756	-12,1	-14 549
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	32 081	31 320	-2,4	-761
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	808,5	843,0	4,3	34,5

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 first quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 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	-0,5	-0,2	0,1
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	-0,8	-0,3	0,0
Services - Professional	-2,6	1,4	1,0
Services - Other	-0,7	2,4	2,4
Rent	-1,1	1,3	1,5
Money lent	-8,3	-4,1	-3,9
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-2,2	-1,1	1,4
Other debts	4,1	-1,7	1,8
Total	-12,1	-2,4	4,3

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 January to March 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 Mar 2023	Actual estimates Mar 2024	% change between Mar 2023 and Mar 2024	Difference between Mar 2023 and Mar 2024
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	43 766	36 276	-17,1	-7 490
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	11 539	11 015	-4,5	-524
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	296,3	273,1	-7,8	-23,2

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	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	10 581	2 856	403	2 418	6 644	1 625	14 280	1 954	1 723	42 484
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
	Feb	9 270	2 095	438	2 038	6 700	1 807	10 471	1 913	1 562	36 294
	Mar	9 693	2 557	512	2 299	5 608	1 426	10 762	1 748	1 671	36 276

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	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	2 480	877	115	877	931	399	3 577	1 049	1 242	11 547
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
	Feb	2 378	781	157	879	1 082	487	3 241	785	1 188	10 978
	Mar	2 742	666	144	728	981	405	3 450	766	1 133	11 015

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	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	77 888	24 067	2 049	21 211	32 732	7 444	140 526	22 692	11 387	339 996
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
	Feb	64 383	22 404	2 792	17 208	49 470	9 204	98 301	24 951	11 972	300 685
	Mar	56 147	18 764	1 750	14 726	36 119	8 364	109 931	18 093	9 172	273 065

¹ Latest three months are preliminary.

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 March 2024 was 83,7%. The improved collection rate for February 2024 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.

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