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STATISTICAL RELEASE

P0041

Statistics of civil cases for debt (Preliminary)

January 2025

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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IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS



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Key results for January 2025

Table A – Key figures for the month of January 2025

Actual estimates	Jan 2025	% change between Jan 2024 and Jan 2025	% change between Nov 2023 – Jan 2024 and Nov 2024 – Jan 2025
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	23 075	-30,5	-24,9
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	7 920	-15,1	-11,6
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	227,8	-15,4	-11,0

The number of civil summonses issued for debt

The total number of civil summonses issued for debt decreased by 24,9% in the three months ended January 2025 compared with the three months ended January 2024.

The largest contributors to the 24,9% decrease in civil summonses issued were:

- 'other' debts (contributing -13,8 percentage points);
- money lent (contributing -4,2 percentage points); and
- services (contributing -3,5 percentage points) – see Table 5.

The number of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt decreased by 11,6% in the three months ended January 2025 compared with the three months ended January 2024.

The largest contributors to the 11,6% decrease were civil judgements relating to:

- services (contributing -8,5 percentage points); and
- 'other' debts (contributing -1,0 percentage point) – see Table 5.

The value of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt decreased by 11,0% in the three months ended January 2025 compared with the three months ended January 2024.

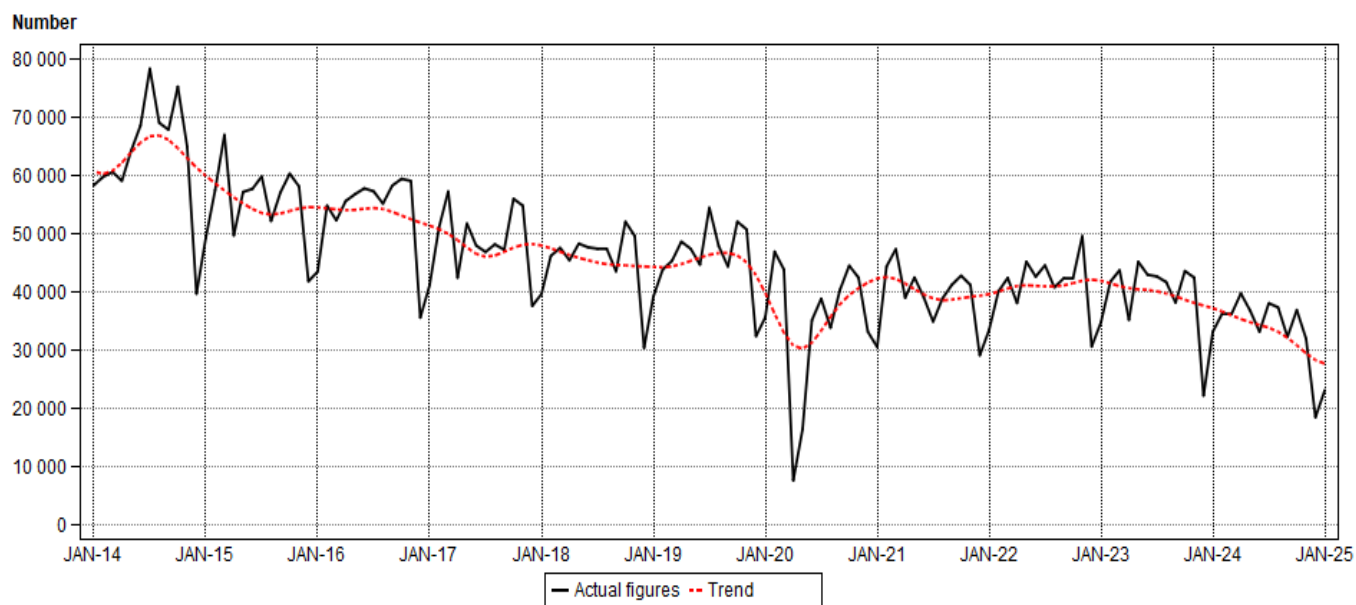
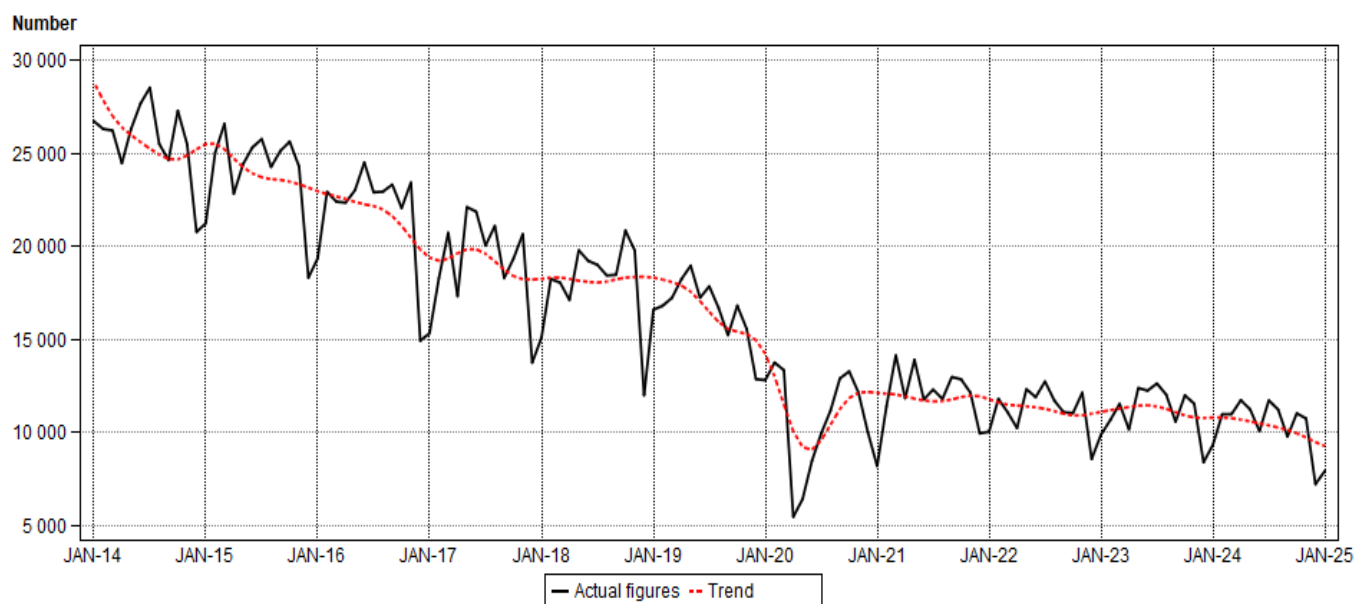
The largest negative contributors were:

- 'other' debts (contributing -3,8 percentage points);
- money lent (contributing -2,9 percentage points);
- promissory notes (contributing -2,3 percentage points); and
- services (contributing -2,0 percentage points).

Goods sold (contributing 0,7 of a percentage point) was the only positive contributor – see Table 5.

In January 2025, 7 920 civil judgements for debt amounting to R227,8 million were recorded. The largest contributors to the total value of judgements were:

- money lent (R55,7 million or 24,5%);
- services (R51,3 million or 22,5%);
- 'other' debts (R43,8 million or 19,2%); and
- promissory notes (R32,5 million or 14,3%) – see Table 2 and Table 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			
		2024	Jan-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	2024	Jan-24	Dec-24	Jan-25
Cases recorded	Actual figures	421 908	33 793	18 886	23 854	359 090	29 553	15 274	19 934
	Seasonally adjusted		39 160	27 130	27 817		34 354	21 971	23 118
Civil summonses for debt	Goods sold - Open account	16 449	1 083	1 072	1 075	9 729	564	712	650
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	11 459	808	568	506	8 767	617	385	314
	Services - Professional	48 838	3 139	2 651	3 244	35 844	2 305	1 680	2 514
	Services - Other	67 284	4 508	3 121	3 400	59 220	4 080	2 789	2 983
	Rent	20 017	1 206	1 246	1 315	14 065	847	842	909
	Money lent	83 718	6 144	4 126	4 757	76 875	5 518	3 657	4 126
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	29 304	1 932	1 637	1 643	26 738	1 721	1 473	1 488
	Other debts	133 337	14 366	4 008	7 135	118 975	13 387	3 375	6 333
	Total - Actual figures	410 406	33 186	18 429	23 075	350 213	29 039	14 913	19 317
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		38 290	26 619	26 923		33 551	21 391	22 520

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2024	Jan-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	2024	Jan-24	Dec-24	Jan-25
Number of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	5 912	553	395	403	3 373	273	226	221
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	3 111	214	159	186	2 517	164	117	144
	Services - Professional	20 933	1 813	1 007	1 370	15 589	1 400	729	1 127
	Services - Other	24 075	1 755	1 393	1 307	21 595	1 570	1 222	1 137
	Rent	10 815	707	721	707	8 490	521	550	455
	Money lent	25 913	1 856	1 662	1 661	23 472	1 713	1 471	1 424
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	10 649	805	642	759	9 839	750	561	676
	Other debts	24 634	1 624	1 233	1 527	21 842	1 461	1 048	1 294
	Total - Actual figures	126 042	9 327	7 212	7 920	106 717	7 852	5 924	6 478
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		10 632	9 195	9 082		9 026	7 611	7 478

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2024	Jan-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	2024	Jan-24	Dec-24	Jan-25
Value of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	158 147	12 891	9 133	17 905	64 864	4 989	3 650	3 965
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	95 696	7 893	4 194	5 435	73 509	5 223	2 836	4 307
	Services - Professional	260 859	20 869	13 387	21 317	179 397	13 971	8 682	14 264
	Services - Other	512 477	33 873	34 030	30 000	434 189	29 128	27 638	25 847
	Rent	392 785	26 565	28 212	21 127	298 673	17 597	18 420	14 677
	Money lent	904 493	68 476	51 811	55 738	846 532	66 253	48 693	50 923
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	462 964	42 223	27 292	32 486	425 608	38 554	23 359	30 070
	Other debts	739 892	56 451	39 667	43 811	624 879	51 355	31 840	35 447
	Total - Actual figures	3 527 313	269 241	207 726	227 819	2 947 651	227 070	165 118	179 500
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		317 214	262 745	275 469		268 302	214 330	215 876

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 2024 and the three months ended January 2025

Actual estimates	Actual estimates Nov 2023 – Jan 2024	Actual estimates Nov 2024 – Jan 2025	% change between Nov 2023 – Jan 2024 and Nov 2024 – Jan 2025	Difference between Nov 2023 – Jan 2024 and Nov 2024 – Jan 2025
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	97 820	73 115	-25,3	-24 705
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	29 267	25 768	-12,0	-3 499
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	847,1	746,2	-11,9	-100,9

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 three months ended January 2024 and the three months ended January 2025 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	-0,7	0,7
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	-1,0	-0,1	0,0
Services - Professional	-1,2	-3,9	-1,9
Services - Other	-2,3	-4,6	-0,1
Rent	-0,5	-0,8	-0,6
Money lent	-4,2	-0,1	-2,9
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-1,5	-0,3	-2,3
Other debts	-13,8	-1,0	-3,8
Total	-24,9	-11,6	-11,0

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 2023 to January 2024, 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 Jan 2024	Actual estimates Jan 2025	% change between Jan 2024 and Jan 2025	Difference between Jan 2024 and Jan 2025
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	33 186	23 075	-30,5	-10 111
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	9 327	7 920	-15,1	-1 407
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	269,2	227,8	-15,4	-41,4

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

Period		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
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	9 613	2 559	512	2 299	5 608	1 426	10 762	1 748	1 671	36 198
	Apr	9 195	2 785	404	2 581	6 885	1 853	12 262	2 016	1 779	39 760
	May	9 449	2 241	410	2 426	6 081	2 133	9 964	2 225	1 868	36 797
	Jun	7 626	2 072	556	2 748	5 275	1 764	9 821	1 706	1 608	33 176
	Jul	8 734	3 128	420	2 556	6 578	1 811	11 065	2 084	1 706	38 082
	Aug	8 393	3 004	307	2 317	7 016	1 775	11 129	1 804	1 609	37 354
	Sep	7 661	2 126	452	2 101	6 320	1 512	8 716	1 829	1 559	32 276
	Oct	8 789	1 989	582	2 486	6 044	1 842	11 355	2 034	1 783	36 904
	Nov	8 200	2 207	374	1 163	5 197	1 611	10 091	1 497	1 610	31 950
	Dec	4 660	1 564	235	1 274	3 127	970	4 489	911	1 199	18 429
2025	Jan	5 428	1 369	395	1 011	4 537	1 288	6 271	1 331	1 445	23 075

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

Period		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
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	2 705	668	144	728	981	405	3 450	766	1 133	10 980
	Apr	2 701	770	74	810	1 156	715	3 409	882	1 217	11 734
	May	2 206	586	209	845	1 288	664	3 282	937	1 220	11 237
	Jun	2 499	656	166	778	1 097	586	2 640	558	1 092	10 072
	Jul	2 565	904	171	884	1 647	641	3 056	675	1 180	11 723
	Aug	2 846	808	215	1 259	1 151	574	2 681	642	1 057	11 233
	Sep	2 033	745	143	803	1 238	604	2 122	814	1 271	9 773
	Oct	2 587	820	269	1 177	1 146	792	2 030	994	1 211	11 026
	Nov	2 670	768	136	694	1 064	658	2 977	655	1 125	10 747
	Dec	1 539	556	90	570	891	511	1 563	494	998	7 212
2025	Jan	2 247	512	146	398	922	482	1 607	586	1 020	7 920

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

Period		Western Cape	Eastern Cape	Northern Cape	Free State	KwaZulu-Natal	North West	Gauteng	Mpumalanga	Limpopo	South Africa
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	61 824	18 926	1 750	14 726	36 119	8 364	109 931	18 093	9 172	278 906
	Apr	71 895	20 442	2 140	17 095	48 057	13 123	119 083	21 823	12 303	325 960
	May	60 574	17 882	3 921	17 607	47 599	8 711	99 799	19 359	11 130	286 584
	Jun	76 361	17 012	3 201	17 149	40 713	8 866	83 650	12 198	8 585	267 734
	Jul	86 670	25 718	2 863	20 485	59 376	12 817	102 361	19 641	10 919	340 851
	Aug	95 148	19 634	5 670	28 083	44 862	13 848	88 583	19 527	7 464	322 820
	Sep	61 543	20 358	2 647	16 933	48 269	13 309	84 026	23 342	13 939	284 367
	Oct	88 045	27 584	5 478	21 076	53 043	15 162	78 052	23 776	11 416	323 632
	Nov	84 121	25 242	5 044	15 666	45 396	12 005	106 216	14 574	10 542	318 807
	Dec	47 705	17 097	1 412	9 633	41 695	7 551	61 562	14 945	6 127	207 726
2025	Jan	61 073	14 318	2 670	8 170	32 041	9 537	69 225	23 596	7 190	227 819

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 (see note 8, page 10).

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 2024.

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: -8,41% Revised: -8,25%	The average of revised growth rates is slightly higher than the average of preliminary growth rates
Mean revision	0,16 of a percentage point	This is the average of the revisions
Mean absolute revision	0,65 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	-1,3 to 2,3 percentage points	This may be regarded as the normal range for revisions, with revisions outside this range being outliers
Number of upward revisions	78 (or 50,0% of the total observations)	
Number of downward revisions	76 (or 48,7% of the total observations)	
Number of zero revisions	2 (or 1,3% of the total observations)	
Is the mean revision (0,16) significantly different from zero?	No	This indicates that there is no bias in the preliminary estimate – see Note 1
Standard deviation of the revisions	1,20 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	84,0%	This is the percentage of revisions that lie between -1,04 and 1,36 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

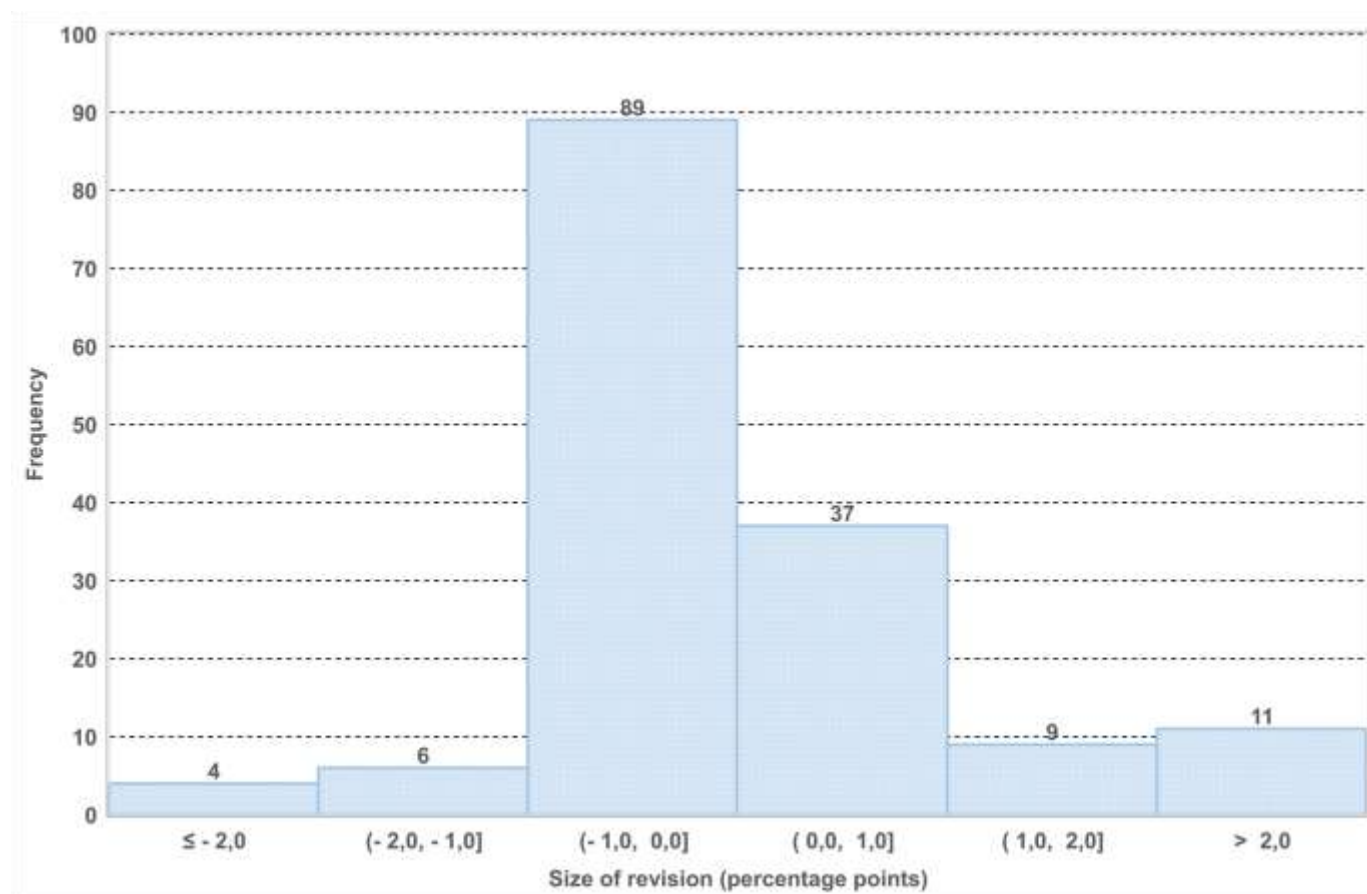
$\hat{\epsilon}_t = R_t - \bar{R}$, with R_t = revision in period t

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 1,53, 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 13 shows the revisions in terms of a histogram. There were 89 revisions between -1,0 and 0,0 ($-1,0 < \text{revision} \leq 0,0$) and 37 revisions between 0,0 and 1,0 ($0,0 < \text{revision} \leq 1,0$). Around 80,8% of revisions lie between -1,0 and 1,0 percentage points.

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:
- 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 and telephone each month from 203 magistrates' offices.
- Collection rate** 7 The preliminary collection rate for the civil cases for debt survey for January 2025 was 78,8%. The revised collection rate for December 2024 was 81,3%.
- Revised figures** 8 Revised figures are mainly due to late submission of data to Stats SA, or respondents reporting revisions or corrections to their figures. The reasons for routine revisions are outlined in the following schedule. Any unscheduled revisions will be promptly indicated in relevant tables to maintain transparency and accuracy.

Statistical release	Reason for revision	Period subject to revision
Jan-25	Additional information from respondents	Oct-24 - Dec-24
Feb-25	Additional information from respondents	Nov-24 - Jan-25
Mar-25	Additional information from respondents	Dec-24 - Feb-25
Apr-25	Additional information from respondents	Jan-25 - Mar-25
May-25	Additional information from respondents	Feb-25 - Apr-25
Jun-25	Additional information from respondents	Mar-25 - May-25
Jul-25	Additional information from respondents	Apr-25 - Jun-25
Aug-25	Additional information from respondents	May-25 - Jul-25
Sep-25	Additional information from respondents	Jun-25 - Aug-25
Oct-25	Additional information from respondents	Jul-25 - Sep-25
Nov-25	Additional information from respondents	Aug-25 - Oct-25
Dec-25	Additional information from respondents	Sep-25 - Nov-25

- Rounding-off of figures** 9 Where figures have been rounded off, discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and the totals.

Seasonal adjustment	10	<p>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:</p> <p>Click to download seasonal adjustment for civil cases for debt February 2022.</p>	
Trend cycle	11	<p>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.</p>	
Unpublished statistics	12	<p>In some cases, Stats SA can also make available statistics which are not published.</p>	
Symbols and abbreviations	13	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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