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STATISTICAL RELEASE

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Statistics of civil cases for debt (Preliminary)

January 2026

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 2026

Table A – Key figures for the month of January 2026

Actual estimates	Jan 2026	% change between Jan 2025 and Jan 2026	% change between Nov 2024 – Jan 2025 and Nov 2025 – Jan 2026
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	21 233	-8,1	-6,2
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	7 075	-10,1	-6,2
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	217,8	-4,5	-6,2

The number of civil summonses issued for debt

The total number of civil summonses issued for debt decreased by 6,2% in the three months ended January 2026 compared with the three months ended January 2025.

The largest contributors to the 6,2% decrease in civil summonses issued were:

- money lent (contributing -4,5 percentage points); and
- services (contributing -2,9 percentage points) – see Table 5.

The number of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total number of civil judgements recorded for debt decreased by 6,2% in the three months ended January 2026 compared with the three months ended January 2025.

The largest negative contributors to the 6,2% decrease were civil judgements relating to:

- money lent (contributing -4,6 percentage points);
- rent (contributing -1,9 percentage points); and
- 'other' debts (contributing -1,6 percentage points) – see Table 5.

The value of civil judgements recorded for debt

The total value of civil judgements recorded for debt decreased by 6,2% in the three months ended January 2026 compared with the three months ended January 2025.

The largest negative contributors were:

- rent (contributing -4,5 percentage points); and
- money lent (contributing -3,3 percentage points).

Promissory notes (contributing 2,1 percentage points) and services (contributing 2,0 percentage points) were the only positive contributors – see Table 5.

In January 2026, 7 075 civil judgements for debt amounting to R217,8 million were recorded. The largest contributors to the total value of judgements were:

- services (R55,6 million or 25,5%);
- money lent (R54,3 million or 24,9%);
- 'other' debts (R49,1 million or 22,6%); and
- promissory notes (R31,1 million or 14,3%) – see Table 2 and Table 3.

Figure 1 – Civil summonses issued for debt

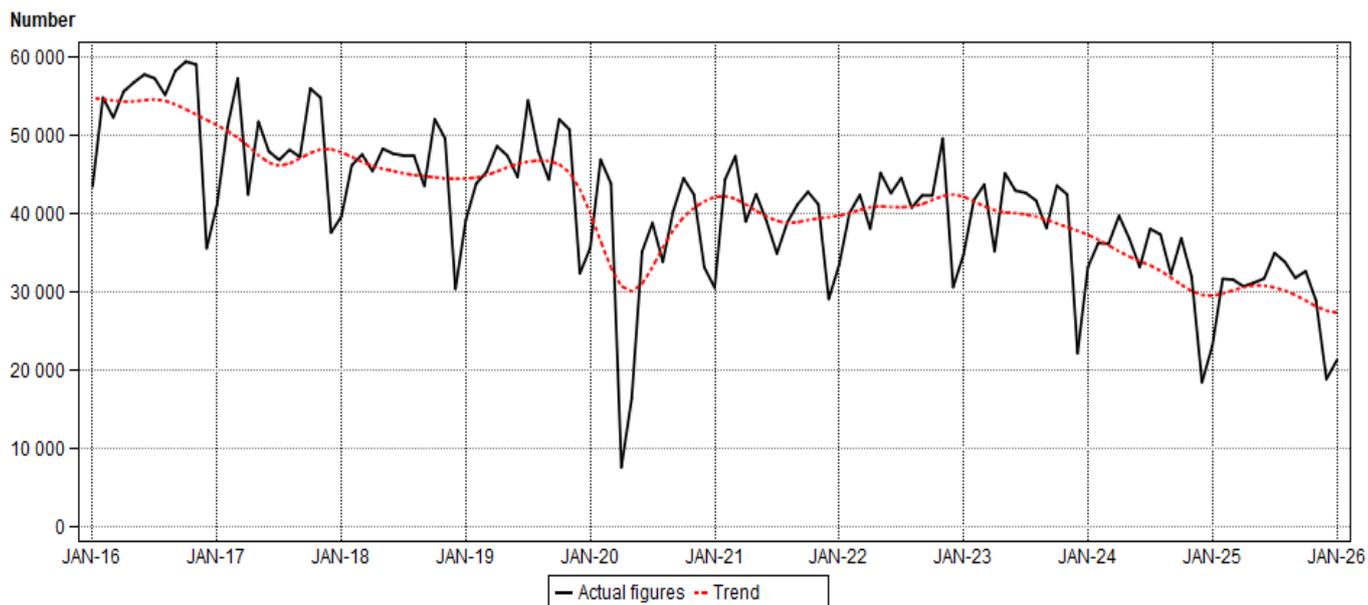
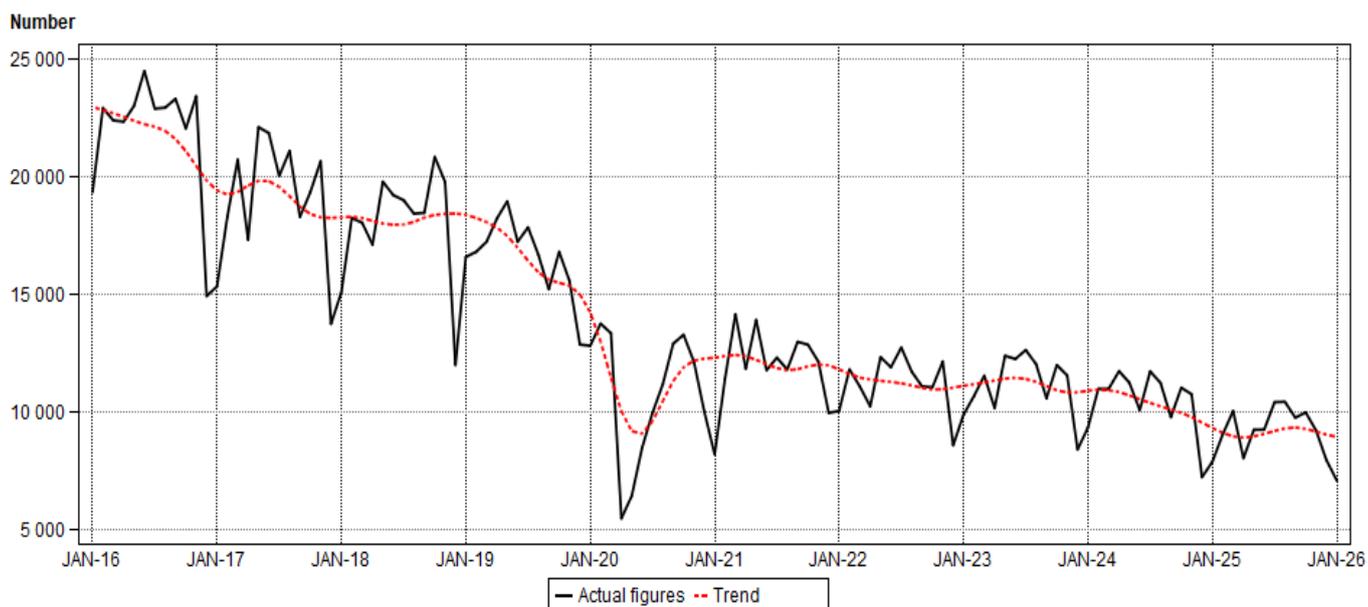


Figure 2 – Civil judgements recorded for debt




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			
		2025	Jan-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	2025	Jan-25	Dec-25	Jan-26
Cases recorded	Actual figures	374 880	23 863	19 778	21 917	309 359	19 958	16 057	18 371
	Seasonally adjusted		28 598	28 034	27 578		24 355	22 940	23 509
Civil summonses for debt	Goods sold - Open account	15 793	1 067	997	976	9 431	643	594	515
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	8 456	548	452	582	5 687	354	305	408
	Services - Professional	50 177	3 222	2 490	2 829	36 249	2 495	1 902	2 165
	Services - Other	59 202	3 405	3 034	2 799	50 906	2 988	2 537	2 343
	Rent	21 362	1 312	1 413	1 052	14 885	905	1 018	701
	Money lent	70 296	4 761	3 315	3 846	63 015	4 130	2 874	3 498
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	22 839	1 665	1 420	1 673	19 806	1 510	1 219	1 496
	Other debts	112 893	7 135	5 722	7 476	99 032	6 333	4 880	6 641
	Total - Actual figures	361 018	23 115	18 843	21 233	299 011	19 358	15 329	17 767
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		28 020	27 196	26 838		23 661	22 156	22 531

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2025	Jan-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	2025	Jan-25	Dec-25	Jan-26
Number of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	5 683	397	419	432	3 188	215	255	227
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	2 285	192	139	139	1 707	148	108	102
	Services - Professional	16 440	1 346	1 031	971	13 750	1 101	890	817
	Services - Other	21 991	1 293	2 155	1 678	18 998	1 125	1 888	1 401
	Rent	9 582	684	501	520	6 931	429	341	326
	Money lent	21 356	1 668	1 361	1 447	18 741	1 431	1 191	1 240
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	11 360	764	947	579	10 482	681	781	522
	Other debts	22 459	1 527	1 388	1 309	18 148	1 294	1 059	930
	Total - Actual figures	111 156	7 871	7 941	7 075	91 945	6 424	6 513	5 565
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		9 218	9 709	8 693		7 630	8 164	6 946

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

Item		Total				Private Persons			
		2025	Jan-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	2025	Jan-25	Dec-25	Jan-26
Value of civil judgements	Goods sold - Open account	156 984	17 885	10 395	10 731	57 440	3 945	4 501	4 185
	Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	68 114	5 473	3 087	2 963	50 953	4 333	2 614	2 739
	Services - Professional	269 106	21 272	16 746	14 103	194 371	14 197	15 340	9 574
	Services - Other	542 123	29 939	46 510	41 529	461 410	25 797	39 662	33 060
	Rent	357 050	21 066	15 439	13 840	250 593	14 598	10 933	11 026
	Money lent	790 704	55 841	54 656	54 322	723 652	51 026	48 862	48 857
	Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	545 432	32 633	40 518	31 139	502 564	30 217	35 635	26 806
	Other debts	731 734	43 811	38 099	49 137	544 297	35 447	28 597	34 330
	Total - Actual figures	3 461 247	227 920	225 450	217 764	2 785 280	179 560	186 144	170 577
	Total - Seasonally adjusted		278 895	279 437	276 483		219 420	232 195	218 717

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 2025 and the three months ended January 2026

Actual estimates	Actual estimates Nov 2024 – Jan 2025	Actual estimates Nov 2025 – Jan 2026	% change between Nov 2024 – Jan 2025 and Nov 2025 – Jan 2026	Difference between Nov 2024 – Jan 2025 and Nov 2025 – Jan 2026
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	73 494	68 946	-6,2	-4 548
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	25 830	24 220	-6,2	-1 610
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	754,5	707,8	-6,2	-46,7

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 2025 and the three months ended January 2026 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	-0,1	0,1	-0,5
Goods sold - Instalment sale transactions	-0,5	-0,7	-1,4
Services - Professional	-0,8	-3,1	-0,6
Services - Other	-2,1	4,9	2,6
Rent	0,6	-1,9	-4,5
Money lent	-4,5	-4,6	-3,3
Promissory notes, bills, R/D cheques, credit cards and other acknowledgements of debt	-0,6	0,7	2,1
Other debts	1,9	-1,6	-0,6
Total	-6,2	-6,2	-6,2

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 2024 to January 2025, 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 2025	Actual estimates Jan 2026	% change between Jan 2025 and Jan 2026	Difference between Jan 2025 and Jan 2026
Number of civil summonses issued for debt	23 115	21 233	-8,1	-1 882
Number of civil judgements recorded for debt	7 871	7 075	-10,1	-796
Value of civil judgements recorded for debt (R million)	227,9	217,8	-4,5	-10,1

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	
2025	Jan	5 428	1 380	395	1 011	4 537	1 317	6 271	1 331	1 445	23 115
	Feb	7 669	2 347	495	1 273	5 047	1 610	10 405	1 339	1 505	31 690
	Mar	7 291	2 120	582	2 524	5 628	1 601	8 934	1 423	1 471	31 574
	Apr	6 992	2 418	374	2 239	5 631	1 186	9 008	1 319	1 550	30 717
	May	7 267	2 491	360	2 294	5 799	1 289	8 665	1 377	1 640	31 182
	Jun	7 862	2 007	390	2 165	5 668	1 450	9 410	1 294	1 480	31 726
	Jul	8 619	2 913	479	2 198	5 551	1 539	10 081	2 005	1 605	34 990
	Aug	7 817	2 655	513	2 705	6 321	1 330	9 464	1 646	1 396	33 847
	Sep	7 719	2 386	347	2 139	5 908	1 566	9 338	987	1 413	31 803
	Oct	6 551	2 641	518	2 187	6 181	1 451	10 202	1 417	1 513	32 661
	Nov	6 016	2 056	380	1 108	4 739	1 121	10 733	1 312	1 405	28 870
Dec	3 994	1 820	212	919	2 688	824	6 148	895	1 343	18 843	
2026	Jan	3 468	1 490	404	824	4 099	1 538	6 687	1 424	1 299	21 233

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	
2025	Jan	2 247	512	146	398	922	433	1 607	586	1 020	7 871
	Feb	2 651	553	143	649	1 008	454	1 903	591	1 087	9 039
	Mar	3 204	631	114	860	1 020	685	1 891	617	1 015	10 037
	Apr	1 700	615	116	753	941	431	1 575	805	1 089	8 025
	May	2 089	693	160	854	1 058	642	1 996	709	1 034	9 235
	Jun	2 463	533	202	714	1 039	576	1 954	681	1 079	9 241
	Jul	2 702	654	224	766	1 191	537	2 421	837	1 079	10 411
	Aug	2 479	698	270	889	1 400	488	1 943	1 205	1 054	10 426
	Sep	2 344	697	191	978	1 439	439	1 989	605	1 069	9 751
	Oct	1 801	690	135	947	1 652	395	2 478	764	1 113	9 975
	Nov	1 866	680	205	794	1 517	339	1 825	856	1 122	9 204
Dec	1 343	637	180	651	1 227	225	2 067	533	1 078	7 941	
2026	Jan	1 271	543	70	533	1 006	399	1 571	680	1 002	7 075

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	
2025	Jan	61 073	14 318	2 670	8 170	32 041	9 639	69 225	23 596	7 190	227 920
	Feb	82 354	17 125	1 792	12 901	43 946	8 601	92 984	12 509	8 446	280 657
	Mar	110 626	24 718	3 644	15 246	37 899	15 676	79 984	22 284	8 663	318 741
	Apr	48 401	19 731	1 879	16 236	37 787	8 587	59 849	18 716	9 464	220 647
	May	69 358	22 396	3 534	16 629	41 548	13 014	80 573	16 756	7 332	271 139
	Jun	83 499	19 435	6 936	12 637	49 843	17 456	76 568	21 145	11 961	299 480
	Jul	88 038	26 638	4 865	16 172	55 980	11 913	101 578	43 538	10 809	359 529
	Aug	101 044	23 042	3 761	20 270	57 610	15 840	87 858	23 106	11 177	343 708
	Sep	76 832	21 414	3 242	16 290	57 578	11 723	83 377	20 486	12 253	303 193
	Oct	61 950	30 487	2 826	17 004	79 093	9 167	111 931	22 684	11 019	346 161
	Nov	60 193	27 267	4 539	14 786	53 492	5 661	68 612	18 371	11 700	264 622
Dec	46 111	26 122	4 029	11 809	45 749	5 023	68 002	11 075	7 529	225 450	
2026	Jan	40 793	15 369	1 995	9 477	47 743	6 531	71 301	18 269	6 286	217 764

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 on page 11).

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 2025.

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

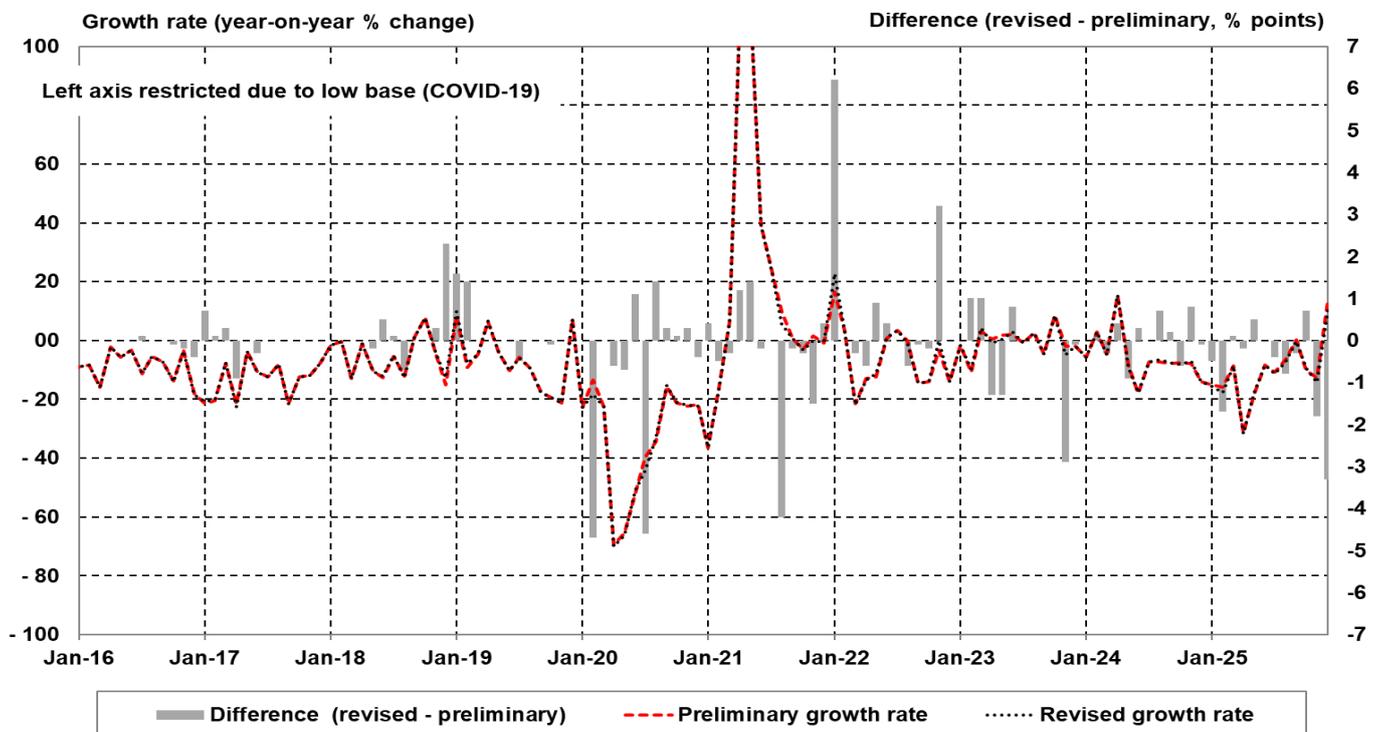


Table 10 – Civil judgements recorded for debt year-on-year growth rates: preliminary and revised

Description	Value / outcome	Comment
Average year-on-year growth rate over the whole period	Preliminary: -8,55% Revised: -8,45%	The average of revised growth rates is slightly higher than the average of preliminary growth rates
Mean revision	0,10 of a percentage point	This is the average of the revisions
Mean absolute revision	0,66 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	-1,7 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	82 (or 48,8% of the total observations)	
Number of downward revisions	84 (or 50,0% of the total observations)	
Number of zero revisions	2 (or 1,2% of the total observations)	
Is the mean revision (0,10) significantly different from zero?	No	This indicates that there is no bias in the preliminary estimate – see Note 1
Standard deviation of the revisions	1,22 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	83,3%	This is the percentage of revisions that lie between -1,11 and 1,32 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

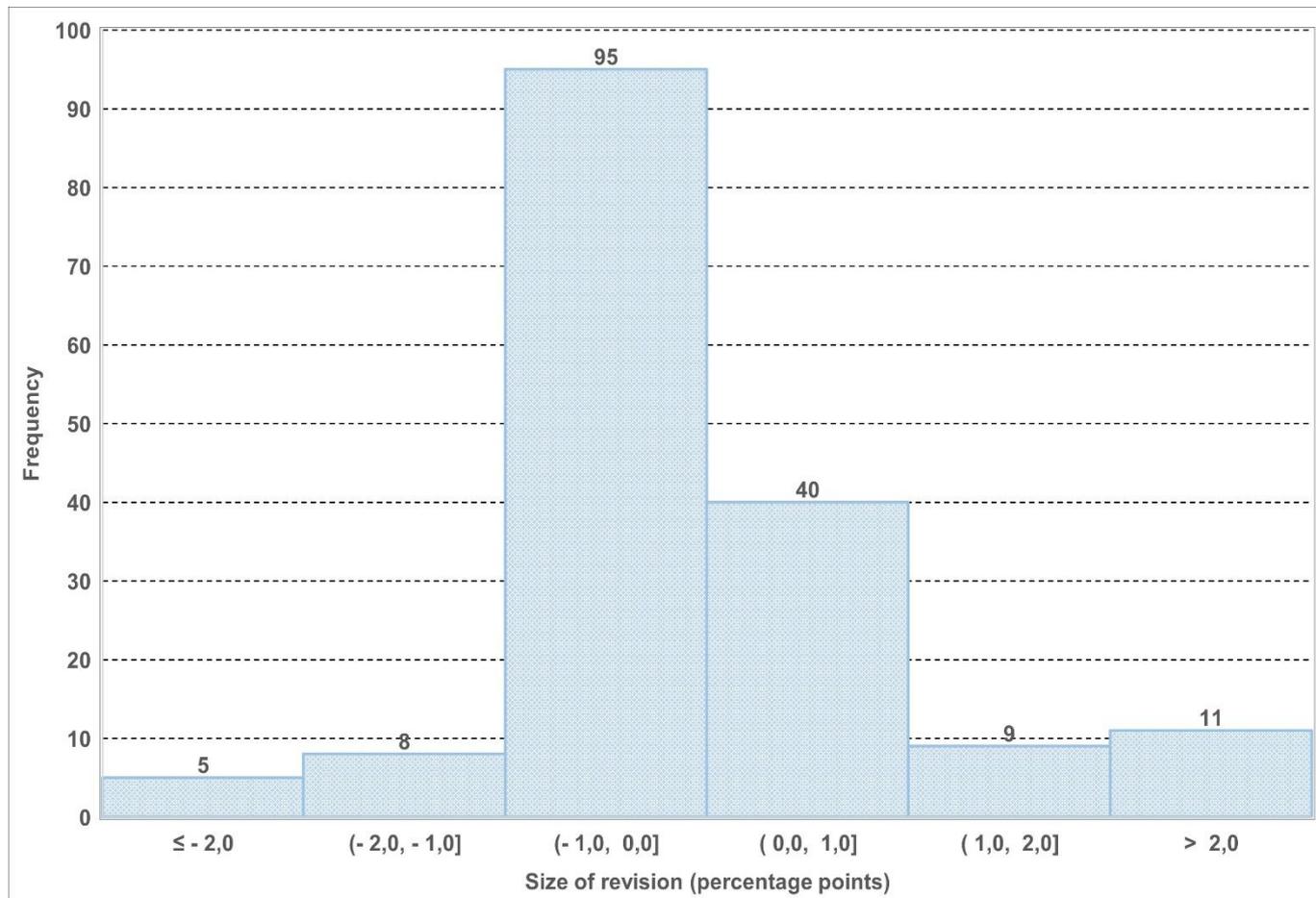
$\hat{\epsilon}_t = R_t - \bar{R}$, with R_t = revision in period t

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 1,00, which lies below the critical value of 1,97, 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 95 revisions between -1,0 and 0,0 ($-1,0 < \text{revision} \leq 0,0$) and 40 revisions between 0,0 and 1,0 ($0,0 < \text{revision} \leq 1,0$). Around 80,4% 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 2026 was 81,8%. The revised collection rate for December 2025 was 84,7%.
- 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. It is important to note that seasonally adjusted figures are revised monthly.

Statistical release	Reason for revision	Period subject to revision
Jan-26	Additional information from respondents	Oct-25 - Dec-25
Feb-26	Additional information from respondents	Nov-25 - Jan-26
Mar-26	Additional information from respondents	Dec-25 - Feb-26
Apr-26	Additional information from respondents	Jan-26 - Mar-26
May-26	Additional information from respondents	Feb-26 - Apr-26
Jun-26	Additional information from respondents	Mar-26 - May-26
Jul-26	Additional information from respondents	Apr-26 - Jun-26
Aug-26	Additional information from respondents	May-26 - Jul-26
Sep-26	Additional information from respondents	Jun-26 - Aug-26
Oct-26	Additional information from respondents	Jul-26 - Sep-26
Nov-26	Additional information from respondents	Aug-26 - Oct-26
Dec-26	Additional information from respondents	Sep-26 - Nov-26

- 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** 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** **11** 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** **12** In some cases, Stats SA can also make available statistics which are not published.
- 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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