

QUARTERLY STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHT | N. 124 | APRIL 2024

QUARTERLY STATISTICS ON CIVIL ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS (2007 – 2023)



Pending civil enforcement actions and clearance rate – Quarterly evolution¹

In the fourth quarter of 2023, the number of pending civil enforcement actions has decreased 3.3% when compared to the end of the second quarter of 2022. On 31 December 2023, the number of pending civil enforcement actions was 347.512 (table 1).

The clearance rate², that measures the capacity of the system on a given moment to face the demand verified on that same moment, was 117.6% in the fourth quarter of 2023, resulting in an increase in pending cases in that quarter compared to the immediately preceding period.

The fourth quarter of 2023 is the 43rd consecutive quarter with a clearance rate above 100 per cent, with the exception of the third quarter of 2014 and the second quarter of 2023 (table 2).

Table 1 - Pending civil enforcement actions, per quarter

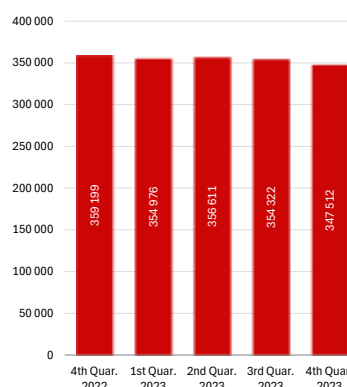


Table 2 - Clearance rate of the civil enforcement actions, per quarter

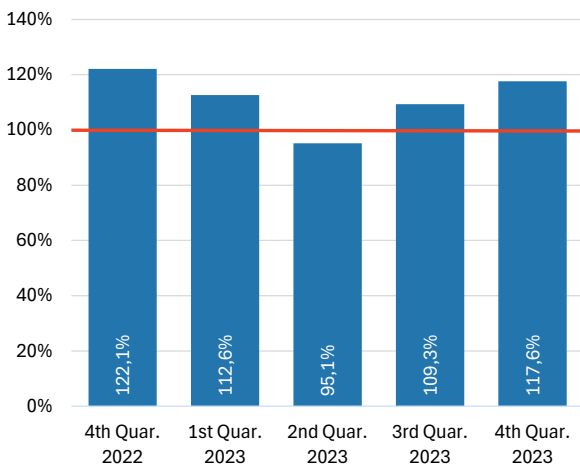
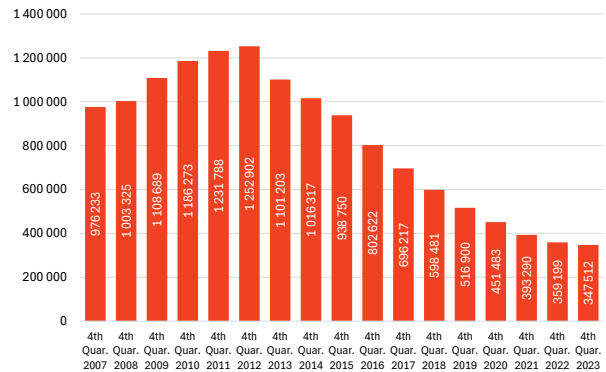


Table 3 - Pending civil enforcement actions, 4th quarter

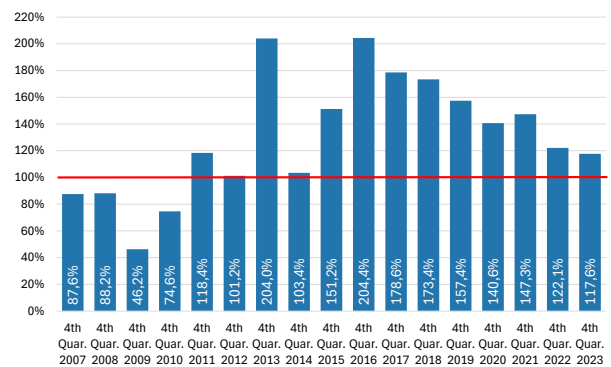


Pending civil enforcement actions, clearance rate and disposition time^{3 4} – Similar periods

Regarding the similar periods corresponding to the fourth quarters of the years 2007 to 2023 and notwithstanding the increase verified between the fourth quarter of 2007 and the fourth quarter of 2012, in the fourth quarters of 2013 to 2023 there was an accumulated decrease of 72.3% in the number of pending civil enforcement actions (decrease of 12,1% in 2013, of 7,7% in 2014, of 7,6% in 2015, of 14,5% in 2016, of 13,3% in 2017, of 14,0% in 2018, of 13,6% in 2019, of 12,7% in 2020, of 12,9% in 2021, of 8,7% in 2022 and of 3,3% in 2023), when compared to the second quarter of 2012 (table 3).

In the fourth quarter of 2023, the clearance rate was 117.6%, an increase of 71.4 percentage points when compared to the minimum value of 46.2%, registered in the fourth quarter of 2009. Considering the similar periods corresponding to the fourth quarter of each year under analysis, the value recorded in the fourth quarter of 2023 is the thirteenth consecutive time that the clearance rate has exceeded 100 per cent (table 4).

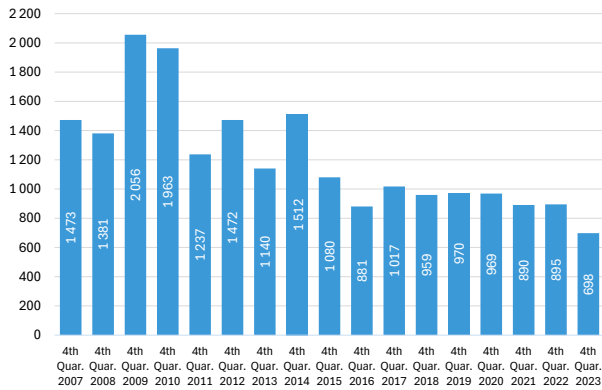
Table 4 - Clearance rate of the civil enforcement actions, 4th quarter



The disposition time in the fourth quarter of 2023 was 698 days, a decrease of 21.1% compared to the fourth quarter of 2022. Compared to the maximum value recorded in the fourth quarter of 2009, the value

recorded in the fourth quarter of 2023 is the lowest disposition time value (table 5).

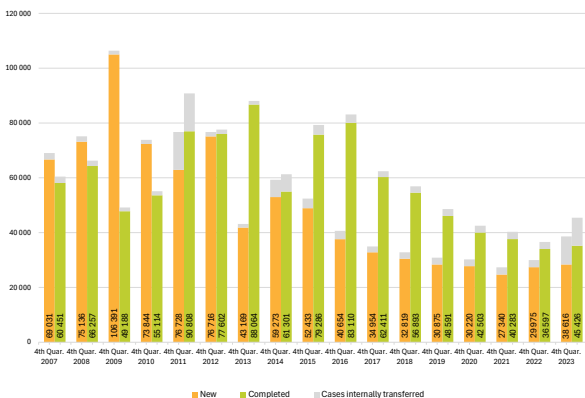
Table 5 - Disposition time (in days) of the civil enforcement actions, 4th quarter



New and completed civil enforcement actions and procedural balance – Similar periods

In the fourth quarters of 2014 and 2019, the number of new and completed civil enforcement actions was unusually high as a result of the application of the laws aforementioned. In the fourth quarter of 2023, the number of completed civil enforcement actions was higher than the number of new civil enforcement actions⁵ (table 6).

Table 6 - New and completed civil enforcement actions, 4th



The procedural balance⁶ (table 7), in the fourth quarter of 2023 was positive, corresponding to less 6.810 cases. This balance justifies the decrease in the pendency and is the tenth consecutive similar quarter recording a favourable evolution.

Table 7 - Procedural balance of the civil enforcement actions, 4th quarter



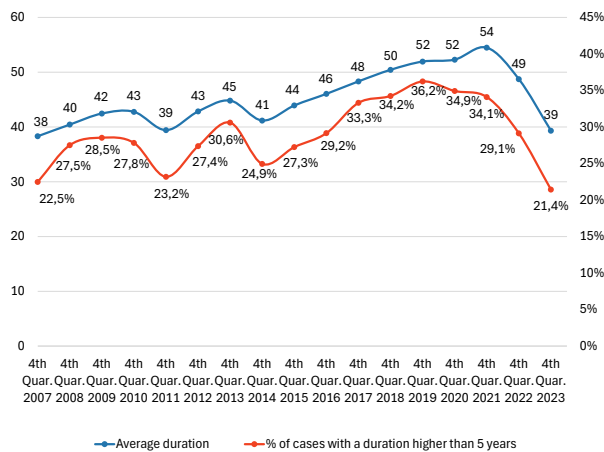
Average duration⁷ of completed civil enforcement actions – Similar periods

Regarding the average duration of the civil enforcement actions completed between the fourth quarter of 2007 and the fourth quarter of 2023, it is possible to observe that the value has ranged between 38 and 54 months (table 8). In the fourth quarter of 2023, when compared to the fourth quarter of 2007, there was an increase of 1 month in the average duration of the completed civil enforcement actions. Considering the similar period, corresponding to the fourth quarter of 2022, in the fourth quarter of 2023 there was a decrease of 10 months in the average

duration of the completed civil enforcement actions. The increase of the average duration of completed cases between the fourth quarter of 2014 and the fourth quarter of 2021 is followed by an increase in the percentage of the older cases that were completed in those quarters. In the fourth quarter of 2023, the ratio of completed cases that were awaiting a final decision for more than 5 years (60 months) registered the lowest value since the same period in 2007, corresponding to 21.4% of the total number of cases.

until they do so. As such, the enforcement procedure must not be considered as pending in court under any other circumstance. In this perspective, data given in this statistical highlight refer just to the total of civil enforcement actions and include those cases that are not awaiting the practice of any act by the court⁸.

Table 8 - Average duration (in months) of the civil enforcement actions, 4th quarter



Pending civil enforcement actions in the first instance courts (quarterly evolution)

Article 551(5) of the Civil Procedure Code, approved by the Law 41/2013, of 26 June, sets forth that the enforcement procedure takes place in court when the law requires or indicates that the court registry or the judge should take action within their competence and

Footnotes

¹ Pending cases correspond to cases that have not yet had a final decision, judgment, sentence or order, in their respective instance, regardless of res judicata. These are cases that are waiting for acts or diligences to be carried out by the court, by the parties or by other entities. In certain types of cases, they may also be waiting for certain facts to occur or for a time period to run out. A suspended case is, for instance, a pending case, irrespective of the cause of suspension. In the case of pending civil enforcement actions in particular, and according to the legal model in force until 1 September 2013, where the new Civil Procedure Code entered in force, the cases rather than awaiting the practice of acts by the courts, may be waiting for acts to be carried out by external entities, public or private, as well as the practice of acts by the enforcement agents. A pending case is not necessarily a delayed case, as it may be a case that is running within the legal timeframes.

² The clearance rate corresponds to the ratio of the total volume of completed cases over the total volume of new cases. If equal to 100% the volume of new cases is equal to the completed ones, being the variation of the pendency zero. If greater than 100%, there is a recovery in the pendency. The higher this indicator is the higher the recovery in the pendency in that year. If less than 100%, the volume of new cases is higher than the completed ones, generating pendency for the following year.

³ The disposition time is an indicator that measures, in days, the time that would be required to complete all the cases that are pending at the end of a particular period based on the rate of work done in the same time period, i.e., the number of completed cases in this period. Applied to a quarter, this indicator multiplies by 91.25 (average number of days in a quarter) the total of pending cases at the end of the quarter divided by the total number of completed cases during that same period of time.

⁴ As the indicators are calculated based on the number of new and completed cases, the clearance rate and the disposition time of the periods in which internal transfers occur between organic units/courts may be affected and should therefore be interpreted accordingly.

⁵ In the fourth quarters of the years 2007 to 2023 were registered, respectively, in the legal model in force until 1 September 2013, 69.031, 75.136, 106.391, 73.844, 76.728, 76.716, 43.169, 59.273, 52.433, 40.654, 34.954, 32.819, 30.875, 30.220, 27.340, 29.975 and 38.616 new civil enforcement actions and also respectively, 60.451, 66.257, 49.188, 55.114, 90.808, 77.602, 88.064, 61.301, 79.286, 83.110, 62.411, 56.893, 48.591, 42.503, 40.283, 36.597 and 45.426 completed civil enforcement actions. However, from these totals only 66.692, 73.199, 105.010, 72.336, 62.899, 75.109, 41.838, 52.963, 48.905, 37.609, 32.826, 30.493, 28.369, 27.760, 24.694, 27.394 and 28.395 new civil enforcement actions and 58.112, 64.320, 47.807, 53.606, 76.979, 75.995, 86.733, 54.991, 75.758, 80.065, 60.283, 54.567, 46.085, 40.043, 37.637, 34.016 and 35.205 completed civil enforcement actions correspond to actual movements of beginning and end of the cases. The remaining 2.339, 1.937, 1.381, 1.508, 13.829, 1.607, 1.331, 6.310, 3.528, 3.045, 2.128, 2.326, 2.506, 2.460, 2.646, 2.581 and 10.221 do not correspond to new civil enforcement actions or to civil enforcement actions that have been completed. These numbers on new and completed cases refer to the total of civil enforcement actions that have run internally between organic units/courts. They are not thus cases that have re-entered the Portuguese courts but cases that were completed in the organic unit/court from where they left and that have entered the organic units/courts to which they were transferred.

⁶ The procedural balance corresponds to the difference between new and completed cases. If positive, there is an increase in the pendency. If negative, there is a decrease in the pendency.

⁷ The average duration of a completed enforcement case in court, according to the legal model in force until 1 September 2013, corresponds to the period of time between the day in which the case began in the court first seized and the day it was completed, even if re-distributed, that is, between the day the case began in the court where it entered and the day it was completed in that same court or in any another court to which it has been redistributed. The concept of average duration used in this statistical highlight corresponds to the so-called duration of the initial case, to which the duration in the various courts where it has run is added.

⁸ Following the changes introduced in the processing system of the first instance courts on the implementation of the aforementioned legal provision in October 2017, the works necessary for its implementation in the scope of the Justice official statistics, including the monitoring of data quality are being carried out. These works will enable us to portray, in this context, the evolution of the civil enforcement actions in the first instance courts.

Framework note – Time scope and other considerations

From 2007, the statistical data related to the cases in the first instance courts are directly gathered from the courts' computer system. Thus, the present procedural situation corresponds to the cases that are recorded in this system. In the new and completed cases are included those that were transferred between organic units as a result of extinction and creation of new courts or sections.

Technical sheet:

The Directorate-General for Justice Policy (DGPJ) of the Ministry of Justice, in accordance with Article 2 (1) of Decree-Law 163/2012 of 31 July has the mission to give technical support within the scope of legislative production and legal assessment, to monitor the policies and the strategic planning for the sector, to coordinate the external affairs and the cooperation in the justice area, being also responsible for the statistical data in the Ministry of Justice.

Law 22/2008 of 13 May defines the basic general guidelines and principles that govern the National Statistical System (SEN), particularly with regard to the delegation of powers of the National Statistical Institute (INE), in other entities.

Under the provisions of Article 24 of Law 22/2008, of 13 May, a protocol was celebrated empowering DGPJ with the production and dissemination of the Justice official statistics.

As a delegated entity, DGPJ is subject to compliance, in its relevant part, with the Law 22/2008, of 13 May, with the Decree-Law 166/2007, of 3 May, as well as with the rules established by Community legislation, adopting the Code of Conduct for European Statistics and the Regulation for the Application of the Principle of Statistical Confidentiality of the National Statistical Institute.

**Directorate-General for Justice
Policy**

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