

Personal debt  
in the UK  
Jan-Dec 2017

StepChange  
Debt Charity

Statistics

# YEAR BOOK

› Between January and December 2017, 619,946 people contacted StepChange Debt Charity for help, or 1 in 100 adults in the UK.

1,698 new clients contacted us every day for advice. That's 71 new clients per hour or one new client every 51 seconds.

## In 2017 more people than ever contacted us for help with their debt problems, particularly through the use of our online advice tool, Debt Remedy.

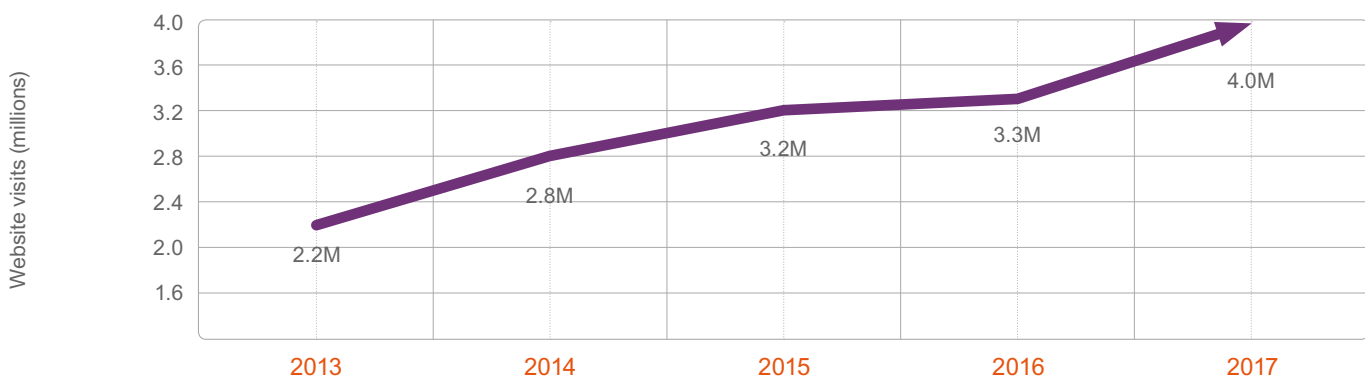
The charity has seen an increase in the number of new clients accessing Debt Remedy over the past five years. Since 2013 we have seen a 61% increase in new clients using this online tool for help with their debts.

The charity's online presence is also growing in other ways. The StepChange website, which provides information on particular types of debt and solutions, received almost 4 million visits in 2017; a 19% increase from 2016.

### New contacts

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
New telephone contacts	287,165	321,134	314,676	320,019	264,856
New Debt Remedy users	220,698	256,544	234,377	279,007	355,090
Total new contacts	507,863	577,678	549,053	599,026	619,946

### Website visits



Unless otherwise stated, the figures in this document are based on the 357,386 new clients debt advised between 1 January to 31 December 2017.

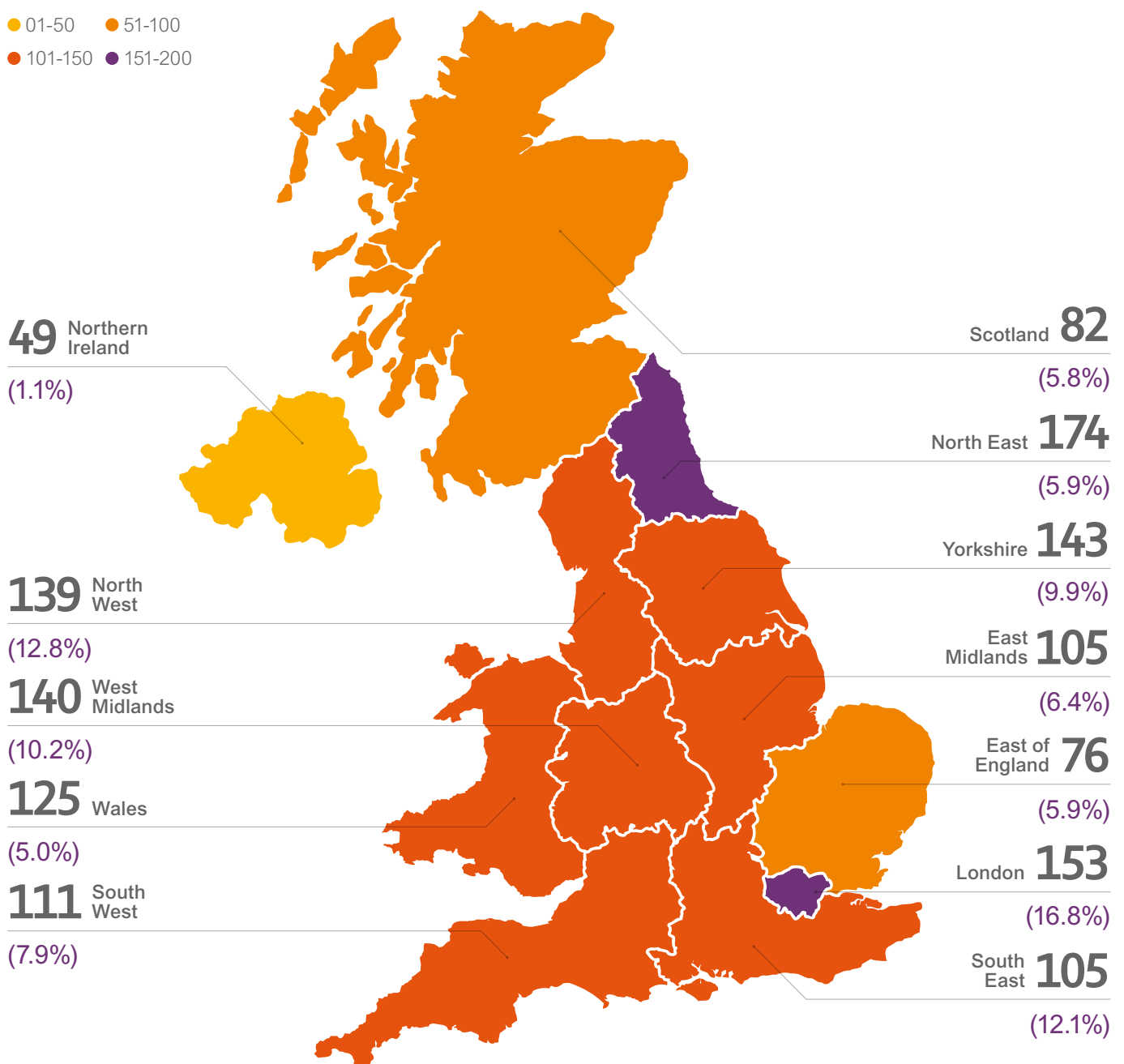
# Who are our clients

## Where our clients live

### Clients per 10,000 population

% = proportion of StepChange clients

- 01-50    ● 51-100
- 101-150    ● 151-200



(Using ONS estimates, UK average 2017)

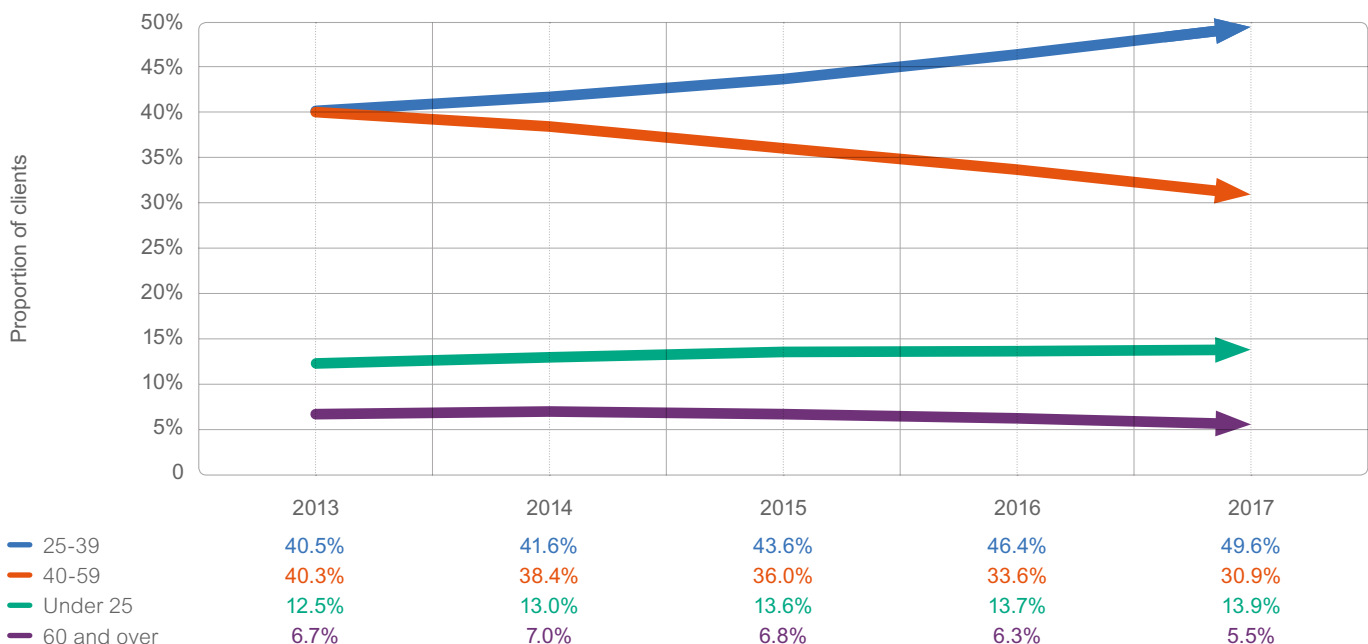
## Age

Although the average age of StepChange clients remains at 41, there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of new clients seeking advice aged under 40.

This younger age group are most likely to receive debt advice through our online advice tool, Debt Remedy.

In 2017, 72% of all new Debt Remedy users were aged between 18 and 40. There has also been an increase in the proportion of clients aged under 40 contacting us via our telephone channel.

Last year, over half (51%) of all new clients seeking advice over the phone were aged under 40, which is a 6% rise from 2013.

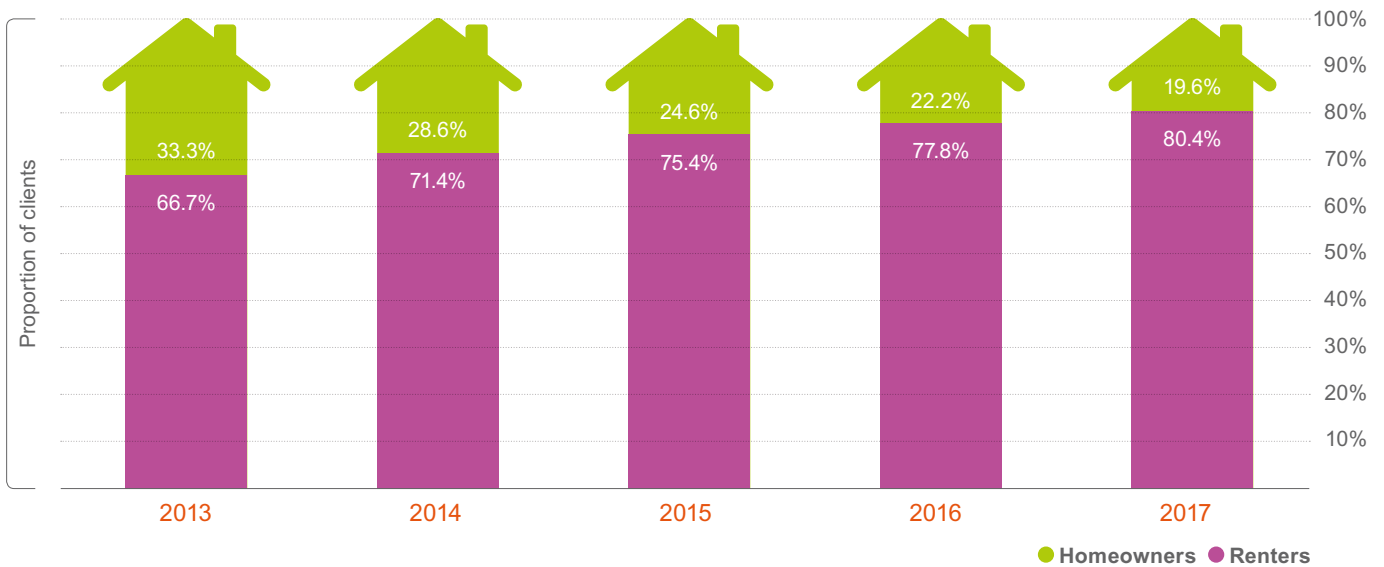


# Who are our clients



## Renters vs homeowners

Just five years ago, more than two thirds of our clients rented their home (67%). However, our latest statistics show the number of clients renting their households has now surpassed 80%. Comparably, only 35% of all UK households are renters.

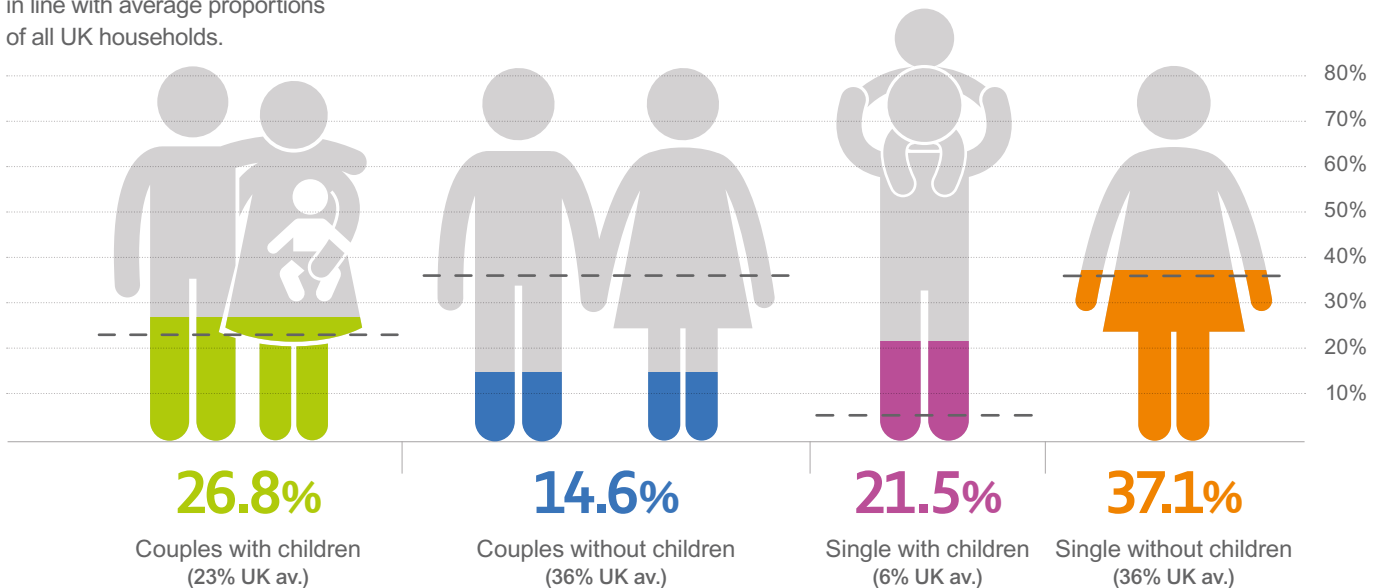


## Family composition

StepChange Debt Charity clients are most likely to be single without children (37.1%), or in a couple with children (26.8%). However, both of these family groups are in line with average proportions of all UK households.

We have seen an increase in the proportion of single parents contacting us for advice, from 20.3% in 2016 to 21.5% in 2017.

This is far higher than the UK average where only 6% of all households are single parent families.



(Using ONS estimates, UK average 2017)

— UK Average 2016

# About our clients

## Clients in vulnerable situations

Our latest data also highlights that more than one in five (20.5%) of our clients identify themselves as having a particular vulnerability beyond their financial difficulties at the time they sought advice. These vulnerabilities can include a visual or hearing impairment, mental health problems or a terminal illness.

The 2017 data shows a client who self-identifies as having a particular vulnerability is more likely to be in an older age bracket, with only 39% aged under 40, compared to 48% aged between 40-59, and 14% aged 60 and over. For all clients who are in vulnerable situations, the average unsecured debt level (£10,312) is less than the average for our overall client population (£13,280).

However, this client group are far more likely to be in arrears on household bills. Over half (57%) of vulnerable clients are behind on a household bill, compared to the average of 40% for all clients.



**One in five clients is identified as vulnerable**

## Income, surplus and expenditure

2017 saw an increase in the average monthly income, expenditure and surplus of our clients. However, after completing StepChange Debt Charity's advice and budgeting process, three in 10 (30%) of all new clients were in a negative budget.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Monthly income (net)	£1,373	£1,375	£1,368	£1,393	£1,468
Expenditure	£1,296	£1,290	£1,285	£1,300	£1,366
Surplus*	£61	£67	£60	£63	£70

(See page 11 for details of methodology changes).

\*Surplus is the amount of balance left at the end of each month after a client has completed StepChange Debt Charity's debt advice and budgeting process. A negative budget describes where a client's expenditure is greater than their income after the debt advice and budgeting process.

# Types of debt and arrears

## Arrears

In 2017, two in five of our new clients were in arrears on at least one of their priority household expenditures, such as an energy bill, council tax, or their monthly mortgage or rent payments.



	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Percentage of clients advised with arrears*	38.5%	39.8%	40.7%	39.6%	39.7%

\*This includes all clients in arrears on board payment, charging order, child maintenance, council tax, County Court judgment, electricity, gas, magistrates' fine, mortgage, mortgage endowment premium, fuel, rent, secured loan, service charge /ground rent, TV licence, water or hire purchase.

## Arrears on essential household bills

	Council tax	County Court judgment	Electricity	Gas	Magistrates' fine	Mortgage	Rent	TV licence	Water	Hire purchase
2017	£1,021	£1,822	£684	£537	£607	£3,125	£947	£77	£709	£884
	30.1%	17.2%	14.3%	11.5%	4.6%	20.6%	21.5%	7.7%	23.7%	20.2%

£ is average arrears amount

% is proportion of clients who have this type of expenditure who are in arrears



## Average unsecured debt

Using our new methodology\*, the mean average unsecured debt of our clients has slightly increased in 2017 following years of steady decrease.

The average unsecured debt for a StepChange client now stands at £13,280.

Additionally, our median average unsecured debt figure has been increasing since 2016.

\*See page 11 for details of methodology changes.



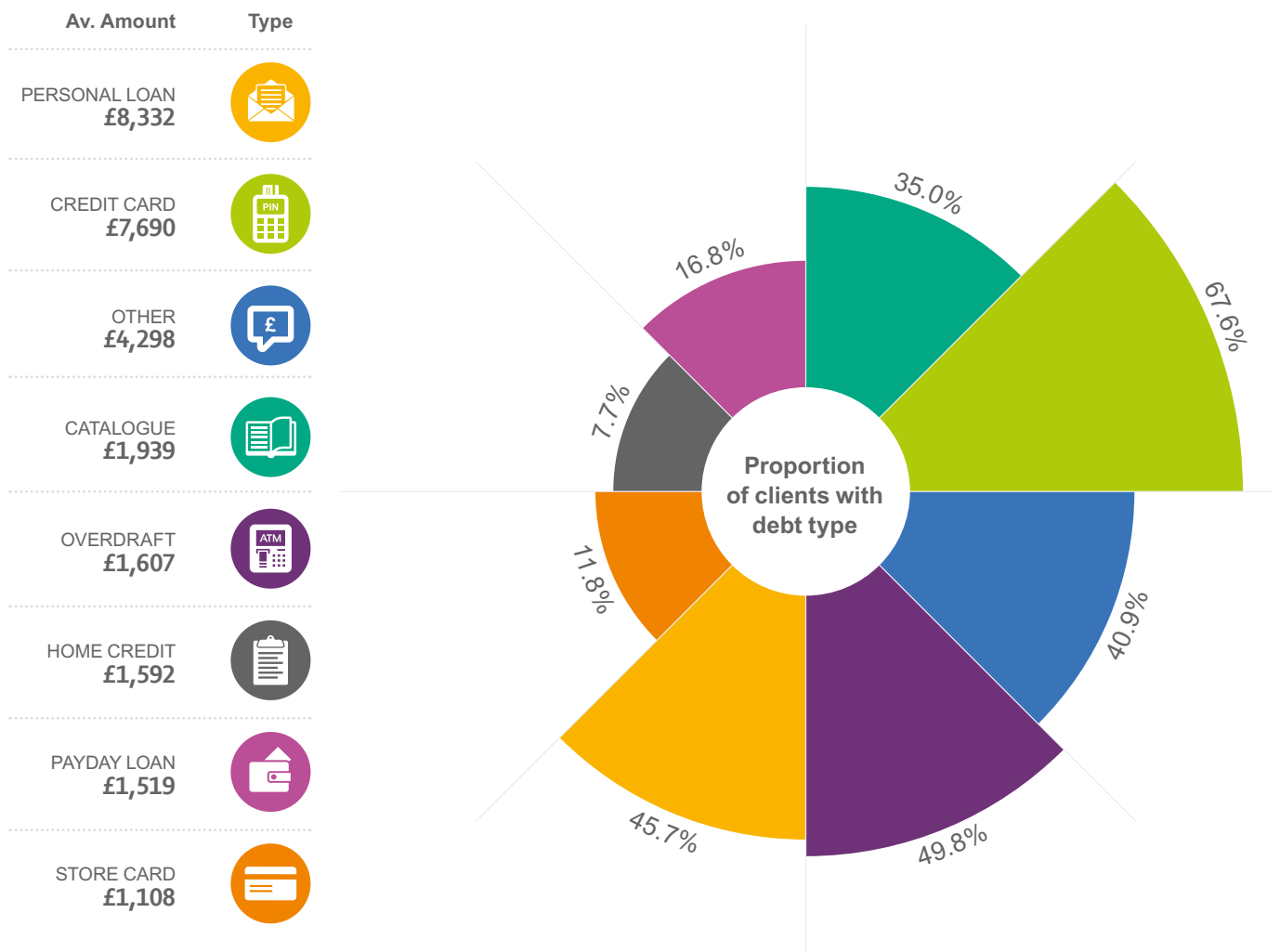
## Mean and median unsecured debt

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Average (mean) unsecured debt	£13,701	£13,173	£13,071	£13,280
Median unsecured debt	£8,053	£7,755	£7,944	£8,110

# Types of debt and arrears

## Types of debt

Credit cards remain the most commonly held type of debt, with more than two thirds of our clients having this debt type.



## Methodology note

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### We have amended the methodology for some of our key statistics for the 2017 yearbook.

We have excluded the highest and lowest 0.1% of our clients' overall arrears amount, overall unsecured debt, income, expenditure and surplus in data collected through our telephone channel, as well as through our online channel.

For averages where data is excluded, we have analysed each data set separately. For example, a client who may have an average unsecured debt which falls in the highest 0.1% may not have an 'extreme' monthly income. In this case the client would be excluded for the average debt calculation, but included in the average income calculation.

StepChange Debt Charity has also gone through a period of internal change as part of our wider Transformation programme which is a root and branch review of the way we help our clients, supported by an overhaul of our IT systems.

To best reflect our new internal processes, we have amended our methodology for counting the 'new contacts' statistics through our telephone channel. This change moves away from counting numbers of new incoming calls through to our helpline, and instead counts the number of 'first advice sessions' for new clients.



**Editor: Josie Warner**

For data table,  
visit the [StepChange Debt  
Charity website](#).

For help and advice with  
problem debts call  
(Freephone) 0800 138 1111  
Monday to Friday  
8am to 8pm and Saturday  
8am to 4pm, or use our  
online debt advice tool,  
[Debt Remedy](#).

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Web: [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)  
Twitter: [@stepchange](https://twitter.com/stepchange)

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