



In this Bulletin: The Retail Price Index and Inflation

Estimates of the Retail Price Index and price inflation rates have been calculated for the first quarter of 2023. The data released in this Bulletin can be downloaded from the St Helena Statistics website in the 'Inflation' file at: <https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/st-helena/statistics/the-economy>.

The Retail Price Index

The Retail Price Index (RPI) is a statistical measure of the change in retail prices on St Helena. An increase in the RPI means that, on average, prices have gone up since the last time they were measured, and a decrease in the RPI means that, on average, prices have fallen. It is important to understand that the RPI is an average measure: if it goes up, it does not mean that all prices have gone up, and similarly, if it goes down, it does not mean that all prices have fallen.

Latest index value and inflation rates

For the first quarter of 2023 the RPI has been measured at 114.8 (Chart 1). A year ago the RPI was 109.0, resulting in an annual inflation rate of 5.4%, comparing prices in the first quarter of 2023 to the same time period in 2022. The previous annual inflation rate (Q4 2022) was 5.7%, 0.3 percentage points higher than Q1 2023 (Chart 2).

Chart 1. St Helena Retail Price Index Q1 2016 to Q1 2023 (Q1 2018=100)

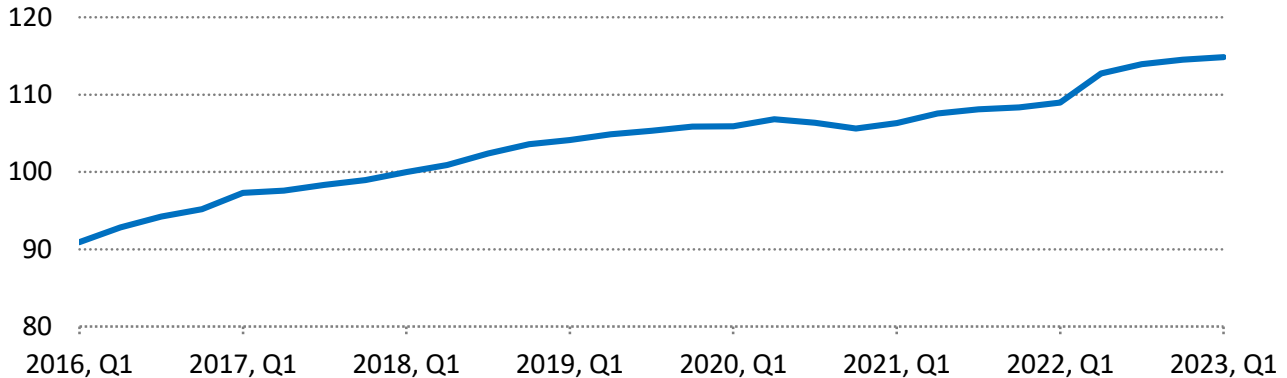
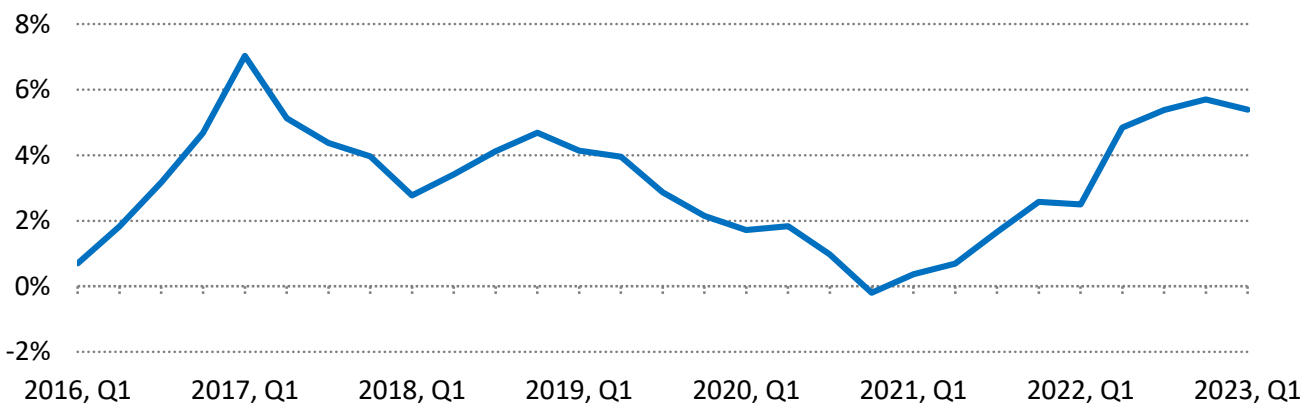


Chart 2. Annual inflation rate, Q1 2016 to Q1 2023



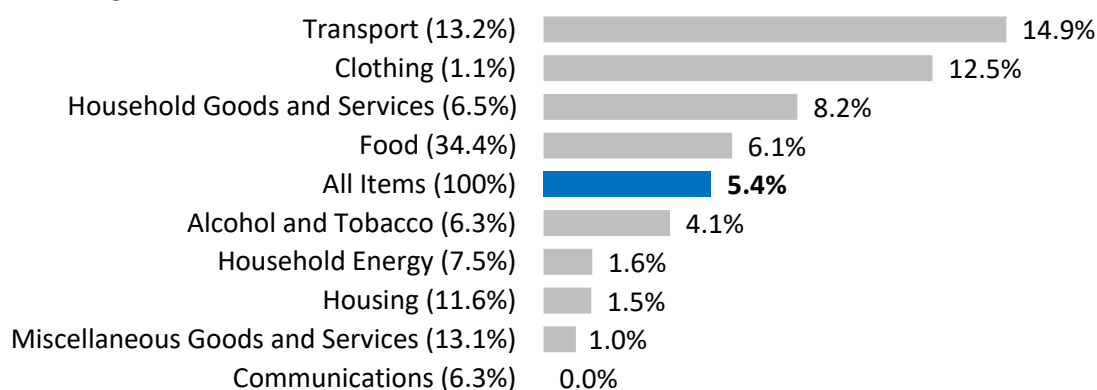
Price changes in the last year

The index uses 203 representative items to measure price changes in nine different categories of household spending. Since a year ago, 89 items increased in price, 19 items decreased in price, and the price of 95 items remained unchanged.

All categories within the index saw an increase over the past year (Chart 3), apart from Communications, which has remained unchanged. Transport is the category with highest percentage change (14.9%), due to the increase in the price of petrol and diesel in 2022. Even though the price of petrol and diesel fuel both dropped in Q1 2023 (from £2.01 to £1.90 a litre and £2.16 to £2.01 a litre respectively), these prices are 38% higher than the same quarter in 2022. Average prices within the Clothing, Household Goods and Services both also saw relatively high price increases over the year. Food prices increased on average by 6.1%, the highest annual increase in this category since Q4 2017.

Chart 3. Annual price change by category, St Helena (Q1 2022 compared to Q1 2023)

Annual change



Note: category weights are provided in parentheses; these indicate the extent to which different categories are represented in the overall index. Categories with higher weight have a greater contribution to the index than categories with lower weights.

Price changes in both the UK and South Africa have a strong impact on prices on St Helena, since the majority of goods imported to St Helena are purchased in those two countries. In February 2023, annual consumer price inflation in the UK was measured at 10.4% (UK Office for National Statistics), and in South Africa it was measured at 7.0% (Statistics South Africa). These rates are relatively high, and in both cases increases in electricity prices have been a major factor. This helps to explain the difference between these rates and St Helena, where electricity prices have been stable during the past year. Changes in the value of the Rand compared to the Pound also have an effect on the price of goods purchased in South Africa, and over the last twelve months the Pound has fluctuated around 20 Rand per Pound, but peaking at around 22 Rand per Pound in March this year.

Please note that the Q1 2023 inflation rate calculations do not include any changes to prices that may have occurred since the arrival of the Maria da Paz cargo ship in late March; these will be included in the Q2 2023 calculations, scheduled to be released in July 2023.

Price changes in the last quarter

Shorter-term changes in prices can be measured by comparing the index with its value in the last quarter, three months ago (i.e. with Q4 2022). Charts 4 and 5 illustrate these quarterly inflation rates; typically they are lower than the annual rates, since they measure price changes over a much shorter period. Between Q4 of 2022 and Q1 of 2023, average prices rose by 0.3%: 31 prices rose, 20 prices fell, and 152 prices remained unchanged. This is the lowest quarterly price change since Q4 2021.

On average, prices in items representing Alcohol and Tobacco and Household Goods and Services rose the most over the quarter. Food rose by 1.6%, up 0.7 percentage points from last quarter (0.9%). Prices used to measure Clothing and Transport fell on average; in the case of Transport, this is mainly because of the fall in the prices of petrol and diesel.

Chart 4. Quarterly inflation rate, Q1 2016 to Q1 2023

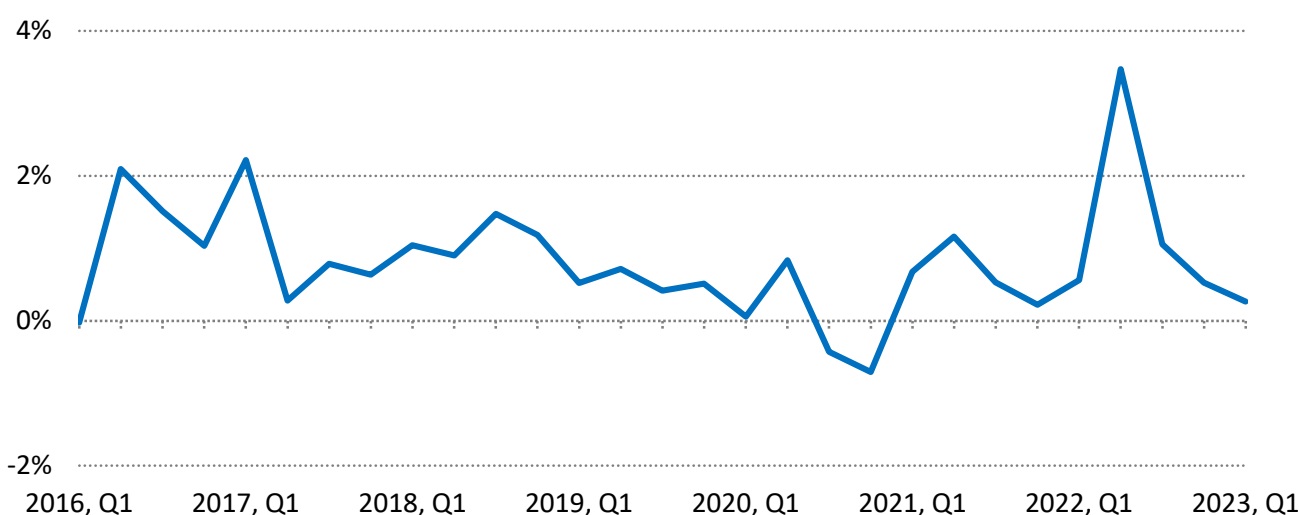
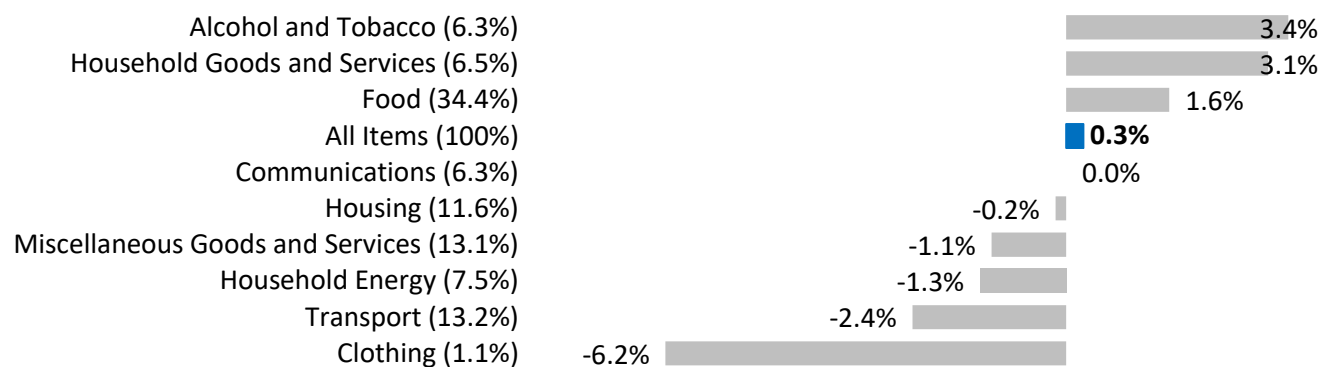


Chart 5. Quarterly price change by category, St Helena (Q4 2022 compared to Q4 2021)

Quarter on quarter change



Note: category weights are provided in parentheses; these indicate the extent to which different categories are represented in the overall index. Categories with higher weight have a greater contribution to the index than categories with lower weights.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

What is price inflation?

Price inflation is the change in the average prices of goods and services over time. The rate of price inflation is calculated from the change in the RPI, which is the official measure of the average change in the prices of goods and services paid by consumers. The RPI is estimated each quarter, i.e. once every three months, and the rate of price inflation is usually quoted on an annual basis; that is, comparing price changes over a 12-month period. Prices and the RPI tend to go up, but they can occasionally go down – which is known as price deflation.

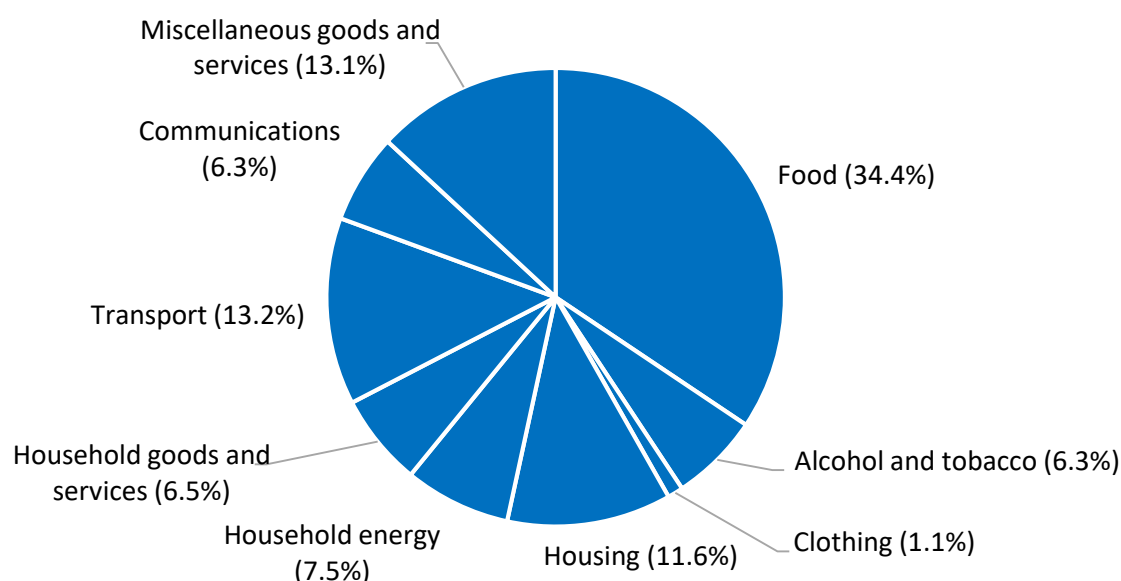
Why do we measure inflation?

An accurate measure of price inflation helps understand the extent and nature of the impact of price changes on the government, businesses, households and individuals. Inflation rates are often used in budgeting and accounting processes so that costs can be adjusted for the effect of price changes.

How is the RPI calculated?

The basis for the RPI is the average weekly cost of goods and services purchased by households on St Helena, sometimes called the RPI 'shopping basket'. Items which households purchase more of, such as food, have the biggest share of the RPI basket. The current RPI uses a basket from the latest Household Expenditure Survey in 2017; prices representing the groups of items in the basket are collected every quarter, and the price of the total basket is compared to the price in the baseline period, the first quarter of 2018. By convention, the value of the basket in the baseline period is scaled to 100, and the RPI values are quoted in relation to that baseline. For example, an RPI value of 120 means that average prices have increased by 20 per cent compared to those recorded in the baseline period.

Composition of average household weekly expenditure (Q1 2018 RPI 'Shopping Basket')



What happens when items are not available?

If an item of the 'basket' is not available then either the previous price will be carried forward from the previous quarter, or a suitable substitute item will be identified and an adjustment calculation made. Care is taken to ensure that this substitute item represents the item category and that it does not introduce error to the measurement of the RPI. An important principle is that price changes should reflect actual price increases and decreases, and not changes in the quality of items.

Where can I get the data?

For detailed tables of the RPI and annual inflation rates from 1994 onwards, please visit: www.sainthelena.gov.sh/st-helena/statistics/ and download the 'inflation' data file. Other datasets, bulletins and reports are also available on our website: www.sainthelena.gov.sh/statistics.

Have more questions or comments?

Please get in touch. We are Neil Fantom, Statistical Commissioner, Kelly Clingham and Justine Joshua, Senior Statistical Assistants. You can find us in person at the **Statistics Office on the top floor of the Post Office**, Jamestown. You can also contact us by telephone on our direct line through **22138**. If calling from overseas, the international dialling code for St Helena is +290. Our general office e-mail address is **statistics@sainthelena.gov.sh**, or you can email team members directly (the format is `firstname.lastname@sainthelena.gov.sh`).