

Hawker Food Price Trends Across Cooked Food Establishment Types

by Ruth Lee, Ryan Lee and Chau Wun
Prices Division
Singapore Department of Statistics

Introduction

Meals at Hawker Centres and Food Courts & Coffee Shops (collectively termed 'hawker food') accounted for 7.9% of the total weights in the 2019-based Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket. In 2023, overall prices of hawker food increased 6.1%, the highest since 2008.

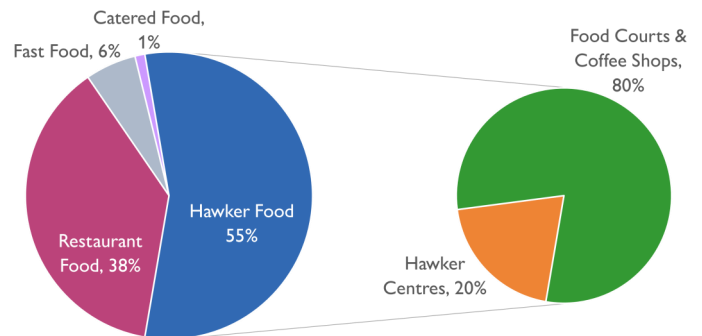
This article provides an overview of the coverage of hawker food in the CPI, examines the key factors driving hawker food inflation in 2023, as well as analyses and compares the price trends of hawker food across Hawker Centres and Food Courts & Coffee Shops.

Expenditure Share and Coverage of Hawker Food in the CPI

The expenditure share in the CPI refers to the proportion of total household expenditure that is allocated to a specific category of goods or services. It reflects the relative importance of each category in the overall spending patterns of consumers.

The expenditure share of hawker food declined over time, from 10.3% in the 2004-based CPI to 7.9% in the 2019-based CPI. Nonetheless, hawker food remains the predominant expenditure group within the Food Serving Services expenditure division, which includes Restaurant Food, Fast Food and Catered Food.

CHART 1 THE 2019-BASED CPI WEIGHTS BY TYPE OF FOOD SERVING SERVICES



Within the hawker food group, meals sold at Food Courts & Coffee Shops currently constitute 80% of its weight share, while those at Hawker Centres make up the remaining 20% (Chart 1).

For the compilation of the CPI for hawker food, prices of over 100 common hawker food items are collected from some 1,700 stalls across the various types of cooked food establishments. Examples of items monitored include coffee/ tea with milk, mee rebus, fishball noodles, chicken rice, economical rice, chicken nasi briyani and ice kachang.

Watch the video on '[How are Prices Collected for the Compilation of Consumer Price Index](#)' for an introduction to how price data are gathered for the compilation of the CPI by the Singapore Department of Statistics (DOS).

DID YOU KNOW? The CPI represents the average price changes across various items and outlets

- Prices used for compilation of the CPI are gathered from a **large number** of outlets for a **wide variety** of items.
- Outlets **revise their prices at different times and in differing magnitude**.

EXAMPLE There are 4 stalls that sell coffee. Each charges \$1.10 per cup of coffee. In Jan 2023, 2 stalls raised their prices.

JAN 2023	Stall 1	Stall 2	Stall 3	Stall 4
	\$1.30 (↑18%)	\$1.20 (↑9%)	\$1.10 (-)	\$1.10 (-)

The average price increase for coffee in Jan 2023 was 7%.



Hence, for consumers who frequent Stall 1 in Jan 2023, the price change they faced was 18%. However, the change in the average price of coffee as measured by the CPI was smaller at 7%.

Main Drivers of Hawker Food Inflation in 2023

Hawker food prices rose 6.1% in 2023, up from 5.7% in 2022 and exceeded the average increase of 2.2% per annum observed during the 2012 – 2022 period.

Within the hawker food group, prices of meals sold at Food Courts & Coffee Shops increased 6.1%, a tick higher than the 6.0% rise at Hawker Centres.

Common food items driving the price increases at these establishments were economical rice, chicken rice, fishball noodles and coffee/ tea.

The broad-based increase in hawker food prices was partly driven by higher input costs, including pricier raw food ingredients¹ due to supply chain disruptions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and compounded by other events such as the Russia-Ukraine war.

Nevertheless, hawker food inflation has since eased significantly to 4.1% in December 2023, down from a peak of 8.3% in January/ February 2023 (Chart 2).

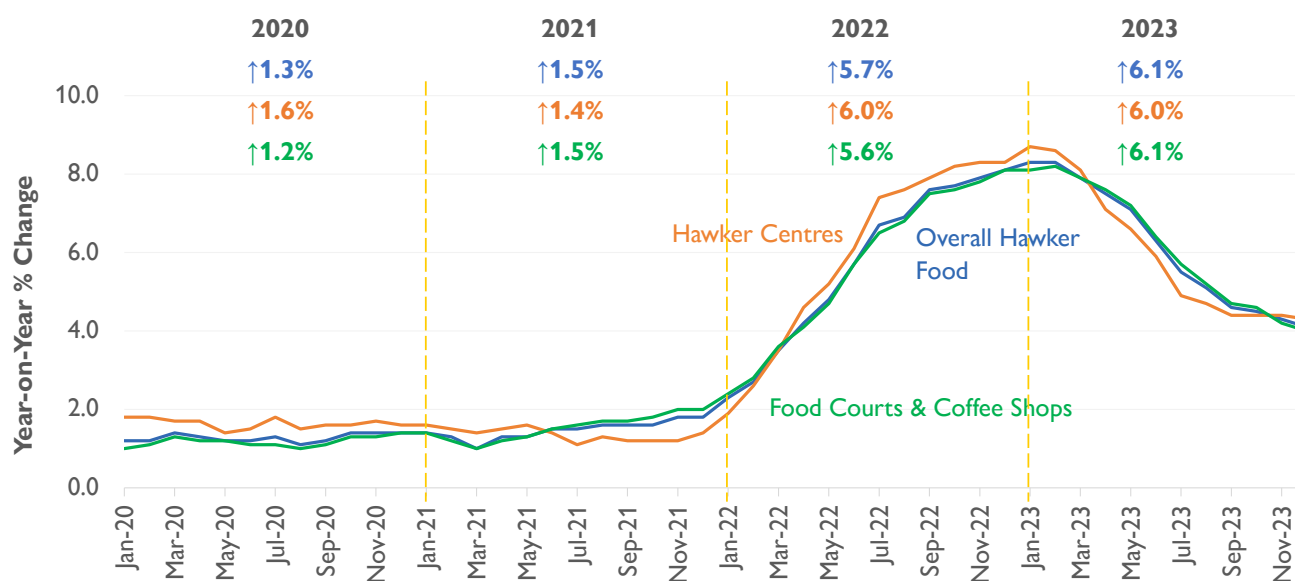
Price Trends of Cooked Food Items² Across Cooked Food Establishment Types

While the CPI for hawker food is compiled from a comprehensive range of representative food items³, 16 cooked food items commonly sold at Hawker Centres and Food Courts & Coffee Shops are selected for detailed analysis. To facilitate price comparisons, these cooked food items are further classified into three primary categories, namely noodle-based, rice-based and beverage items.

Among these food categories, noodle-based cooked food items exhibited the most substantial average price increase of 7.6% in 2023. This was closely followed by beverages at 7.0% and rice-based cooked food items at 6.3%.

At Hawker Centres, beverages recorded the largest price increase of 6.9% in 2023, rising faster than noodle-based (6.2%) and rice-based (5.4%) cooked food prices. In contrast, at Food Courts & Coffee Shops, prices of beverages (6.3%) increased more gradually compared to noodle-based (8.0%) and rice-based (6.5%) cooked food items.

CHART 2 YEAR-ON-YEAR PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN THE CPI FOR HAWKER FOOD, 2020 – 2023

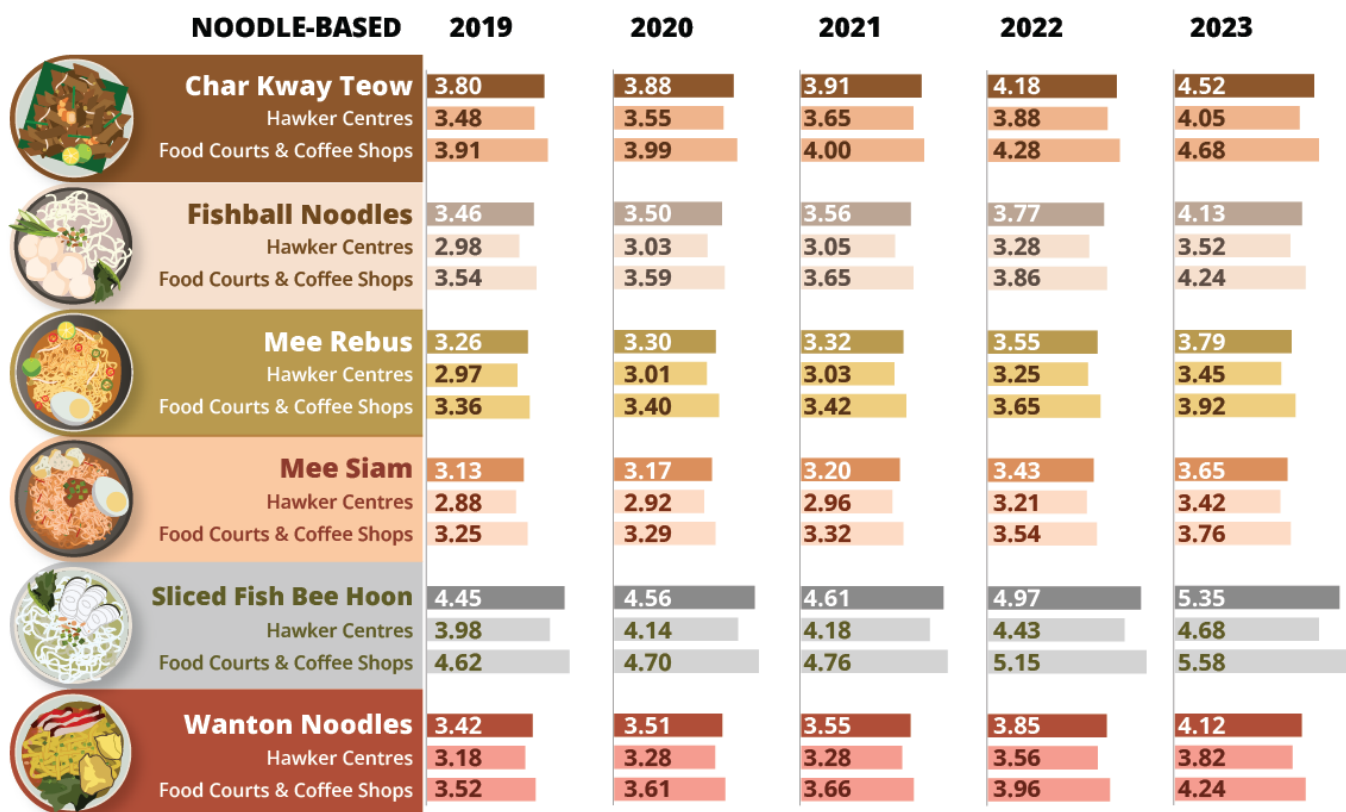


1 See [Speech](#) by Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong at Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI's) Committee of Supply Debate 2023 and [Macroeconomic Review Volume XXII Issue 1, Apr 2023](#)

2 The 16 cooked food items include char kway teow, fishball noodles, mee rebus, mee siam, sliced fish bee hoon, wanton noodles, chicken rice, chicken nasi briyani, char siew rice, duck rice, economical rice (1 meat & 2 vegetables), saba fish set with rice, coffee/ tea without milk, coffee/ tea with milk, canned drinks and milo with milk. These items have been specially selected for this analysis. They are widely available across Hawker Centres and Food Courts & Coffee Shops and there are adequate consistent quotations for these items to establish meaningful and reliable average prices.

3 Explore the interactive dashboard on ['Average Retail Prices of Selected Consumer Items'](#) for the average retail prices of 72 consumer items monitored in the CPI.

CHART 3 AVERAGE RETAIL PRICES FOR NOODLE-BASED COOKED FOOD ITEMS (\$), 2019 – 2023



Noodle-based Cooked Food Items

The noodle-based cooked food items used for analysis and comparison of price trends between the cooked food establishment types were char kway teow, fishball noodles, mee rebus, mee siam, sliced fish bee hoon and wanton noodles.

Notably, sliced fish bee hoon had the highest average price of \$5.35 while mee siam had the lowest average price of \$3.65 (Chart 3).

In terms of price changes, Chart 4 details the prices registered for all six noodle-based cooked food items in 2023, with increases ranging from 6.4% to 9.5%.

At Hawker Centres, prices of the noodle-based cooked food items rose between 4.4% and 7.3%. In particular, fishball noodles and wanton noodles saw the most significant price increases while char kway teow was the most gradual. Nonetheless, more pronounced price increases were observed at Food Courts & Coffee Shops (ranging from 6.2% to 9.8%), with a bowl of fishball noodles costing almost 10% more in 2023 compared to 2022.

CHART 4 YEAR-ON-YEAR PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN AVERAGE RETAIL PRICES OF NOODLE-BASED COOKED FOOD ITEMS BY COOKED FOOD ESTABLISHMENT TYPE (%), 2023

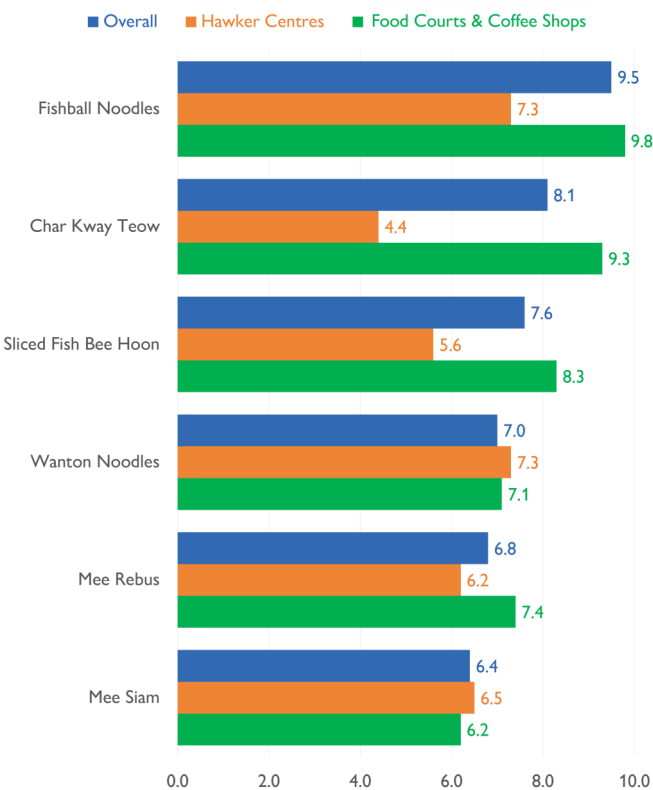
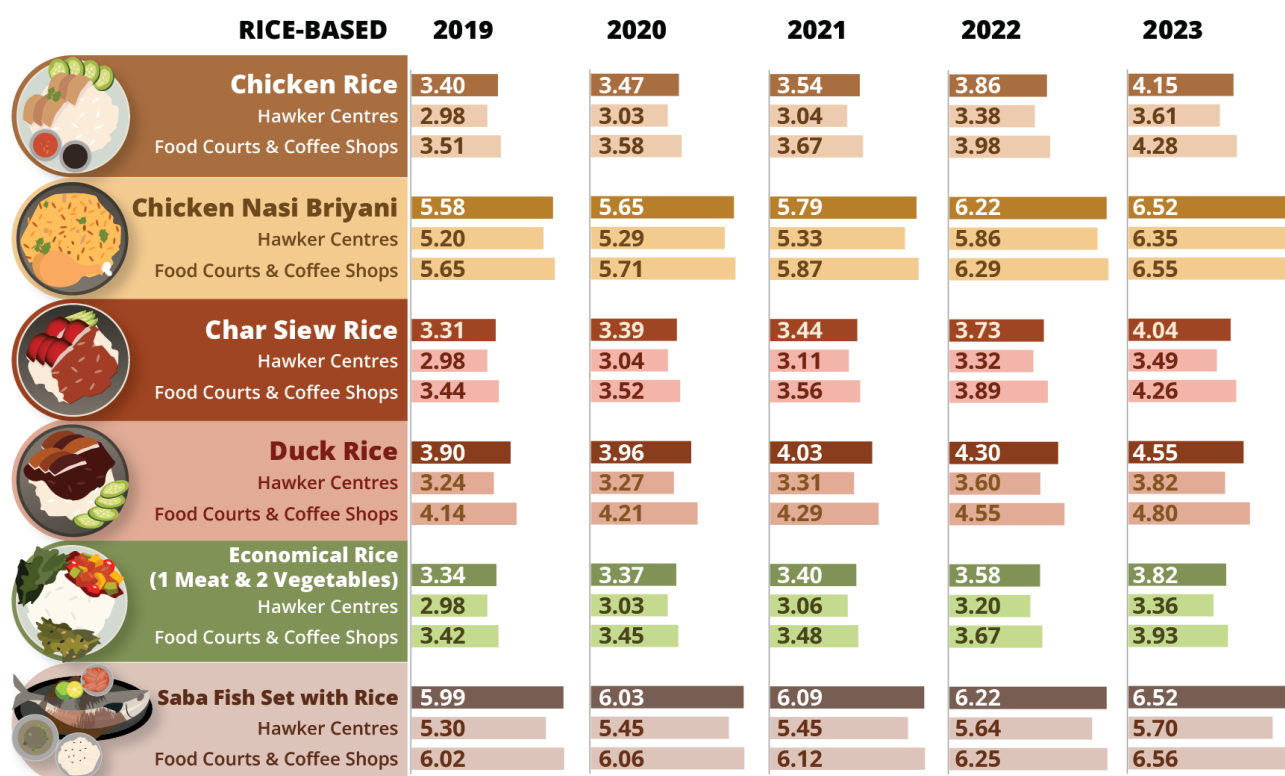


CHART 5 AVERAGE RETAIL PRICES FOR RICE-BASED COOKED FOOD ITEMS (\$), 2019 – 2023

Rice-based Cooked Food Items

Among the rice-based cooked food items sold at Hawker Centres and Food Courts & Coffee Shops, chicken rice, chicken nasi briyani, char siew rice, duck rice, economical rice (1 meat & 2 vegetables), and saba fish set with rice were selected for analysis. Chicken nasi briyani and saba fish set with rice cost the most at an average price of \$6.52 each, while economical rice recorded the lowest average price of \$3.82 across all cooked food establishment types (Chart 5).

Price increases between 4.8% and 8.3% year-on-year were observed for all six rice-based cooked food items, with char siew rice recording the sharpest increase of 8.3% in 2023 as shown in Chart 6.

The prices of rice-based cooked food items rose between 4.1% and 9.5% at Food Courts & Coffee Shops in 2023, outpacing the price increases of 1.1% to 8.4% observed at Hawker Centres. Among the food items, chicken rice, char siew rice, economical rice and saba fish set with rice at Food Courts & Coffee Shops saw greater price increases compared to those sold at hawker centres. Interestingly, chicken nasi briyani registered the largest price increase at Hawker Centres (8.4%) but the smallest increase at Food Courts & Coffee Shops (4.1%).

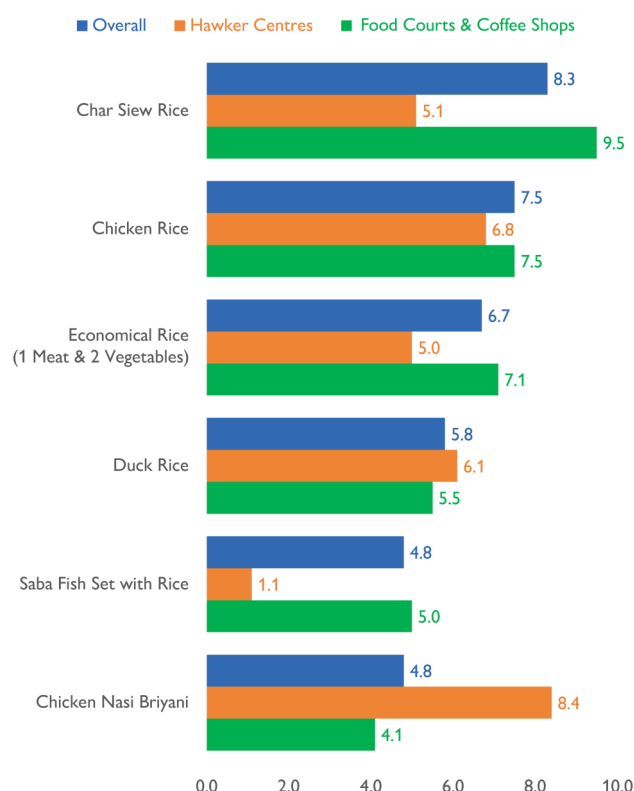
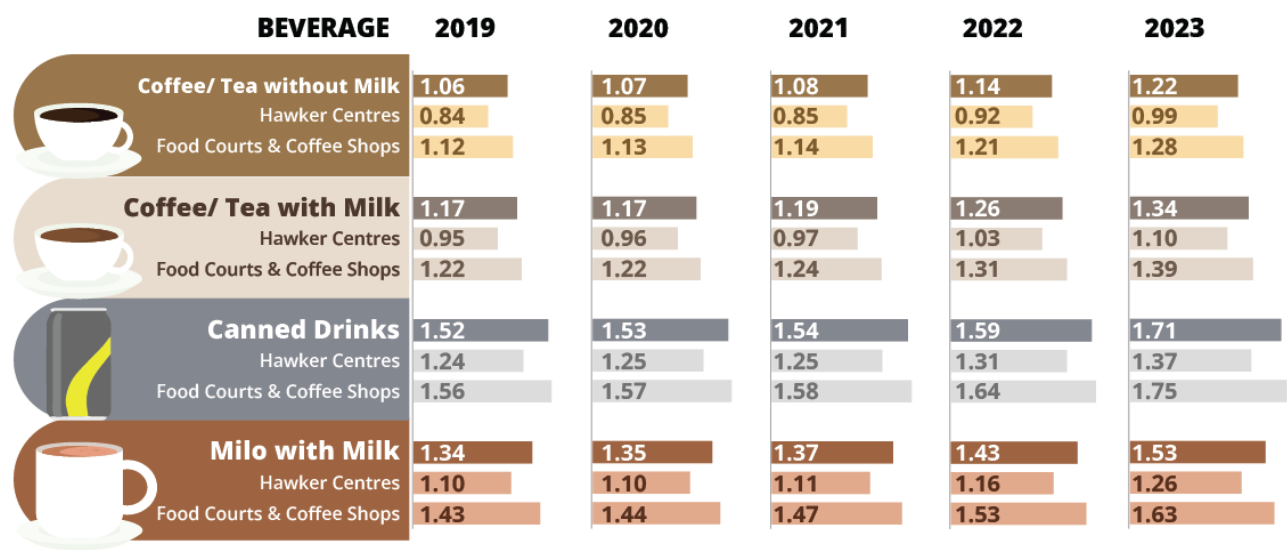
CHART 6 YEAR-ON-YEAR PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN AVERAGE RETAIL PRICES OF RICE-BASED COOKED FOOD ITEMS BY COOKED FOOD ESTABLISHMENT TYPE (%), 2023

CHART 7 AVERAGE RETAIL PRICES FOR BEVERAGE ITEMS (\$), 2019 – 2023



Beverage Items

The beverages chosen for price analysis between Hawker Centres and Food Courts & Coffee Shops were coffee/ tea without milk, coffee/ tea with milk, canned drinks and milo with milk. Canned drinks had the highest average price of \$1.71, while coffee/ tea without milk recorded the lowest average price of \$1.22 (Chart 7).

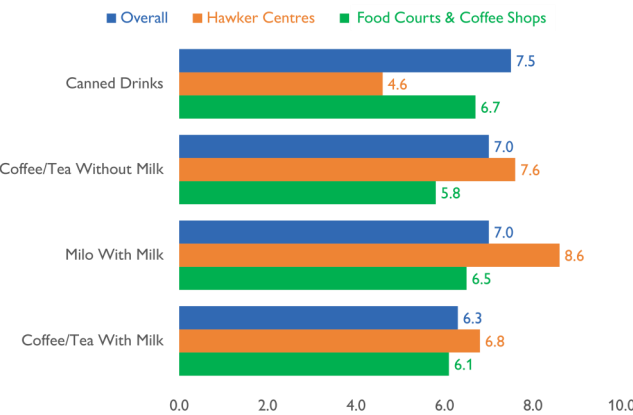
In 2023, all four beverage items experienced price increases ranging from 6.3% to 7.5% (Chart 8). Canned drinks, which recorded the highest average price level, rose at the fastest pace during the period.

Beverages registered price increases of between 5.8% (coffee/ tea without milk) and 6.7% (canned drinks) at Food Courts & Coffee Shops.

In comparison, the increases in beverage prices at Hawker Centres ranged from 4.6% (canned drinks) to 8.6% (milo with milk).

While canned drinks sold at Food Courts & Coffee Shops saw larger price increases relative to those sold at Hawker Centres, the increase in prices of coffee/ tea and milo with milk were higher at Hawker Centres.

CHART 8 YEAR-ON-YEAR PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN AVERAGE RETAIL PRICES OF BEVERAGE ITEMS BY COOKED FOOD ESTABLISHMENT TYPE (%), 2023



Conclusion

Hawker food inflation has risen in recent years amidst higher global food commodity prices and elevated cost pressures. Comparing hawker food prices between cooked food establishment types, the average price levels of cooked food items sold at Food Courts & Coffee Shops tend to be higher than those sold at Hawker Centres. In addition, some items, especially beverages, saw larger price increases at Hawker Centres (partly due to a lower price base) whereas the noodle-based and rice-based cooked food prices generally rose faster at Food Courts & Coffee Shops.