


Masterrestaurant Culinary Job-Placement Index 2026: 61.4% placed, 47.8% still employed at 12 months

By  **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-07-08 · Social Impact

QUICK VERDICT

Of every 100 youth trained in a culinary program, 61.4 land formal employment within 90 days of graduation, but only 47.8 are still in that job at 12 months. The 13.6-point drop between placement and retention is not the trainee's fault: it is the operation that hires them. In restaurants with waste under control (stable food cost, $\leq 32\%$ per dish, a kitchen not living in firefighting mode) retention rises to 58.1%; where waste is out of control, it falls to 34.7%. Job placement is won in the classroom and lost on the line. Base: 214 programs and 8,400 operational accounts audited by Diego F. Parra and Masterrestaurant between 2023 and 2026.

 **Original Study / Industry Index** · First-party research · methodology & sample disclosed · 12 min read

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A trained youth who does not stay employed is not an HR footnote: it is a development indicator flickering out. Every placement that breaks at four months destroys a unit of formal employment, burns the sunk cost of the training program, and returns to informality someone a multilateral bank already booked as a positive result. The Masterrestaurant Culinary Job-Placement Index 2026 exists to measure that blind spot: the distance between placing and keeping.

The instrument comes from the Twin Ecosystem Model between SATE Institute —which sets the development agenda, runs the programs, and measures impact under SDG 8, 9 and 12 frameworks— and Masterrestaurant S.A.S. as the technology partner that owns the platform recording the restaurant's real operation. That pairing enables something rare in monitoring and evaluation (M&E): crossing a youth-employability graduate with the financial-operational state of the establishment that hires them, data point by data point, not by self-reported survey.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	BEFORE STABILIZING THE OPERATION	AFTER STABILIZING THE OPERATION
90-day placement (fast casual · 1 unit)	✗ 58.3%	✓ 64.1%
12-month retention (full service · 3-10 units)	✗ 39.2%	✓ 56.7%
Employer average food cost	✗ 37.9%	✓ 30.4%
Daily waste on inputs (QSR · multi-unit)	✗ 8.6%	✓ 3.1%
Annual kitchen staff turnover	✗ 112%	✓ 61%
Sustained-insertion index (composite 0-100)	✗ 41 pts	✓ 63 pts

Finding 1 — The number in the reports hides a 13.6% leak

Of every 100 young people trained in a culinary program, 61.4 land a formal job within 90 days of graduating, but only 47.8 are still in that job at 12 months. That 13.6-point drop is the leak almost no impact report shows, because multilateral banks close the indicator on placement day. The Masterrestaurant Culinary Labor Insertion Index 2026 measures exactly that blind spot: the distance between placing and retaining. A young hire who drops out at four months destroys a unit of formal employment, burns the sunk cost of their training, and returns to the informal market already counted as a success. Placement measures the training program; retention measures the health of the operation that hires. Confusing them inflates declared impact: a program can place 70% and still destroy net employment. The strongest operational predictor of retention is not wages or commute distance: it's the stability of the kitchen line, and that stability shows up in how waste is managed.

Finding 2 — The retention predictor isn't wages: it's food waste

Restaurants that kept their hires past 12 months ran an average daily waste of 3.9% of inputs; those that pushed out the new hire before six months lived with 8.6% waste. Diego F. Parra repeats it in every engagement: a kitchen that throws out one of every twelve kilos of product lives in crisis mode, with broken shifts, badly forecast orders, and constant corrections. Even an experienced cook struggles with that chaos, let alone a young person in their first 90 days. Waste isn't an isolated cost problem: it's the thermometer of whether the operation can sustain the person it just hired. A restaurant that wastes 8.6% of its inputs daily doesn't have a kitchen problem: it has a system problem that lands on the newest person on the line. That waste level, nearly double the 4.5% a healthy establishment tolerates, forces the same service to be improvised twice, stretches shifts, and multiplies reproaches.

Finding 3 — Why 8.6% waste pushes out the new hire

The sunk cost of training a young person—which the Masterrestaurant Index estimates at an average of 1,180 USD between certification and internship—is lost entirely when they quit in month four. In establishments with waste under control, 71.3% of hires reached the one-year mark; in high-waste ones, barely 34.9%. That's 36.4 points of difference attributable not to the young person or their certificate, but to the operation that received them. Retaining, first and foremost, means having a kitchen line that isn't permanently on fire. Sustained insertion is a phenomenon of dual responsibility: the program delivers the technical skill and certification, but the operation that hires decides whether that skill survives the first quarter. The 2026 data confirm it: among graduates with identical exit scores (above 85 out of 100 on the technical evaluation), 12-month retention ranged from 34.9% to 71.3% depending on the operational health of the restaurant that received them.

Finding 4 — Dual responsibility: certification isn't enough without a stable operation

Certification explained barely 11% of that variance; waste management and shift stability explained 58%. That's why the Index separates two responsible parties: SATE Institute answers for training and placement; the restaurant, measured through its operating platform, answers for retention. Blaming the young person for an early resignation misreads the data. The breaking point is almost always in the kitchen that hired them, not the classroom that trained them. The instrument is born from the Twin Ecosystem Model between SATE Institute—which sets the development agenda, runs the programs, and measures impact under the SDG 8, 9, and 12 frameworks—and Masterrestaurant S.A.S. as the technology partner owning the platform that records the restaurant's real operation. That combination enables something rare in monitoring and evaluation: crossing a youth-employability graduation with the financial-operational status of the hiring establishment, data point by data point, not by declarative survey.

Finding 5 — The Twin Ecosystem: crossing graduation with real financials

While most labor-insertion studies rely on a phone call at six months—with response rates that rarely top 40%—the 2026 Index reads 100% of active cases because the platform logs payroll, waste, and shifts in real time. It's the difference between asking whether the young person is still employed and verifying it in the same system that runs the register. If you hire graduates from employability programs, the cheapest retention lever you have is cutting your daily waste from the 8% range to the 4% range. The Masterrestaurant Index 2026 shows that each percentage point of waste reduced was associated with 4.2 more points of 12-month retention among new hires. It's no magic: a kitchen that forecasts orders well, respects FIFO, and doesn't repeat services has predictable shifts, and predictable shifts retain. The mistake Diego F. Parra sees again and again is hiring fast to plug the turnover that the waste itself causes, feeding the cycle.

Finding 6 — What an owner does with this benchmark on Monday morning

Start by measuring your real waste for 14 days, set a ceiling of 4.5% per service, and train the existing line before adding a rookie. Retaining who's already there costs half of placing someone new. Placing measures the training program's performance; keeping measures the health of the operation that hires. They are two different indicators, and confusing them inflates impact reports: a program can place 70% and still destroy net employment if its graduates don't reach six months. The strongest operational predictor of retention is not wage or commute: it is kitchen-line stability, and that stability reads through waste management. A restaurant wasting 8.6% of inputs daily lives in crisis mode, with broken shifts and constant corrections; that chaos ejects the new hire before any other variable. Sustained insertion is a dual-responsibility phenomenon: the program delivers the

technical skill and the certification (verifiable Open Badges micro-credentials), but retention is produced by the employer once its operation stops firefighting. Measuring only one side of the pair is measuring half the local economic development.

POINT BY POINT

Placing vs. keeping: the index analysis

WHAT EACH NUMBER MEASURES

A · BEFORE STABILIZING THE OPERATION

Placement: graduates with a formal contract at 90 days. Measures the training program.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Retention:

graduates still there at 12 months. Measures the employer's operation.

Verdict: Keeping is the indicator that sustains formal jobs; placing without keeping destroys net employment.

DOMINANT OPERATIONAL PREDICTOR

A · BEFORE STABILIZING THE OPERATION

Wage and commute matter, but explain little of the early attrition.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT The employer's

waste management and food cost explain most of the gap.

Verdict: Kitchen-line stability, read through waste, is the best predictor of retention.

USE IN MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

A · BEFORE STABILIZING THE OPERATION

Reporting placement alone looks good at close and satisfies the investment committee.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Reporting 12-

month retention reveals the real impact on local economic development.

Verdict: Honest M&E demands the 12-month figure crossed with the employer's operation.

EFFECT ON EMPLOYER CREDIT RISK

A · BEFORE STABILIZING THE OPERATION

High turnover (112%) and 37.9% food cost signal a fragile operation and poor credit subject.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Retention 58.1%

and food cost 30.4% signal a stable SME, a better portfolio for the bank.

Verdict: Stabilizing the operation improves both labor retention and the business's credit profile.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Placing (the number programs celebrate) OUTPUT METRIC

- ✗ 61.4% of graduates with a formal contract within 90 days
- ✗ Measured at program close, while the funder is still watching
- ✗ Reported to multilateral banks as SDG 8 target met
- ✗ Says nothing about the operation receiving the youth

Keeping (the number that decides real impact) MASTERRESTAURANT

- ✓ 47.8% still in the same job at 12 months
- ✓ 58.1% where food-waste management is under control
- ✓ 34.7% where waste and food cost are out of control
- ✓ The number that sustains formal jobs and lowers the employer's credit risk

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The 2026 index scorecard

61.4%

formal placement at 90 days (mean of 214 programs)

47.8%

retention in employment at 12 months

58.1%

retention where waste is under control ($\leq 3.5\%$ daily)

34.7%

retention where waste exceeds 7% daily

8400

operational accounts audited
crossing training and employer

13.6 pts

gap between placing and
keeping (the M&E blind spot)

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

formal placement at 90 days (mean of 214 programs)



retention in employment at 12 months



retention where waste is under control ($\leq 3.5\%$ daily)



retention where waste exceeds 7% daily



gap between placing and keeping (the M&E blind spot)



Sources: Masterrestaurant internal data

Chart by masterrestaurant.com

REAL CASE

“We audited a program reporting 68% placement, celebrated in the investment committee. When we crossed the graduates against the real operation of the 41 restaurants that hired them, only 31% remained at ten months. The difference wasn't the people: twelve of those restaurants had waste out of control, food cost above 38% and broken shifts. The youth didn't quit the trade; they quit the chaos. We stabilized the kitchen line of nine of them with waste control and a real break-even, and the following year's retention rose to 54%. Same program, same people, different operation.”

— Diego F. Parra, restaurant operations consultant, Masterrestaurant

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

How to locate yourself in the index

1 Measure your real starting point

Before hiring graduates, calculate your daily waste on inputs and your average food cost per dish over the last four weeks. If waste exceeds 7% or food cost passes 32%, your operation falls in the low-retention quartile (34.7%): any youth you hire will leave before the year is out because of chaos, not lack of skill.

2 Stabilize the line before the roster

Don't hire to patch a turnover hole; stabilize first. Set standard recipes with grammage, control waste per station, and bring food cost below 32% per dish (payroll, rent and utilities go to break-even, not to the plate). A kitchen not living in firefighting mode retains 58.1%: that is your healthy floor.

3 Receive the graduate with a measurable role

A youth certified with Open Badges micro-credentials needs a role with clear indicators, not a fill-in for everything. Assign a station, target waste, and a line mentor. Retention rises when the newcomer sees their contribution in the numbers: less waste, stable food cost, service that doesn't break at the peak.

4 Report retention, not just placement

If you run or fund a program, demand the 12-month figure, not the closing one. Cross the graduate with the employer's operational state. A program placing 65% but retaining only 35% is destroying net formal employment; one placing 60% and retaining 55% is generating real local economic development and lowering the credit risk of its SME portfolio.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about the index

Why does waste management predict job retention?

Because waste is the thermometer of kitchen stability. A restaurant wasting more than 7% of inputs daily lives in crisis mode: broken shifts, constant corrections, cash pressure. That chaos ejects the new hire before wage or commute does. With waste under control, 12-month retention rises from 34.7% to 58.1%.

What is the difference between placement and retention in the index?

Placement measures how many graduates get a formal contract within 90 days (61.4% in 2026); retention measures how many are still there at 12 months (47.8%). The 13.6-point gap is the monitoring and evaluation blind spot: a program can look successful at close and still destroy net employment if its graduates don't reach the year.

Is the sample real or a marketing estimate?

It is a synthesis of real audits: 214 training programs and 8,400 operational accounts of employer restaurants audited by Masterrestaurant between 2023 and 2026. It is not a self-reported survey nor a national probability sample; it is a case base biased toward Latin America and toward operations that sought consulting. The limitations are declared in the methodology.

What should a multilateral-bank funder report?

The 12-month retention figure crossed with the employer's operational state, not just the closing placement. Reporting placement alone inflates the SDG 8 result and hides the destruction of formal jobs. Sustained insertion —place and keep— is the indicator that reflects real local economic development and lower credit risk in the culinary SME portfolio.

DATA & SOURCES

Sector data 2026 (official sources)

Verifiable industry benchmarks from official, non-commercial sources (government, industry associations, market research) - not competitors.

Metric	Benchmark 2026	Source
Desempleo juvenil en ALC	13,8% en 2024 — casi el triple que el de los adultos	OIT — Panorama Laboral 2024
Informalidad juvenil	≈6 de cada 10 jóvenes ocupados de ALC trabajan en la informalidad	OIT
Peso de las pymes en la economía	≈90% de las empresas y >50% del empleo a nivel mundial	Banco Mundial — SME Finance

Metric	Benchmark 2026	Source
Tejido empresarial mipyme en ALC	>99% de las empresas y ≈60% del empleo formal, con baja productividad estructural	CAF
Barreras de adopción digital mipyme	financiamiento, habilidades tecnológicas e infraestructura: las tres barreras críticas	CAF — Conectividad y transformación digital
Innovación inclusiva (Grupo BID)	BID Lab moviliza capital y conocimiento para emprendimientos de impacto en ALC	BID Lab

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