

RPL programme unlocks career paths for SA chefs

Chefs in Mpumalanga and Limpopo are now turning years of hands-on experience into accredited qualifications through the Department of Tourism's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme.



Source: DCStudio via [Freepik](#)

By awarding NQF Level 5 Occupational Trade certificates, the programme formally recognises their skills and helps chefs access wider career opportunities in South Africa's hospitality and tourism sectors.

In 2025, 50 chefs enrolled in the RPL initiative. Many had built solid experience in kitchens but lacked formal accreditation, which had previously limited promotions and career progression.

Career growth and opportunities unlocked

Chef Simon Shilangu, who began his culinary journey as a trainee chef at the Southern Sun – Mbombela in 2015, honed his pastry skills and obtained a Level 5 trade certificate. His accreditation led to a promotion to Chef de partie, opening doors to further career advancement. "I feel confident in my culinary skills, and this qualification will enable me to build a formidable career for myself," he said.

Chef Sannah Mphonyana Mbewe said the programme also strengthened her theoretical knowledge, giving her a broader understanding of the tourism sector. "I understand the critical role I play in advancing the economy. Maintaining service standards is essential to delivering quality experiences for visitors and ensuring our industry is sustainable," she added.

Addressing skills gaps in tourism

These chefs' experiences highlight a common challenge in South Africa's tourism workforce: many workers have years of on-the-job experience but no formal certification. The RPL programme empowers participat

by upskilling them and awarding trade certificates, enabling more diverse career paths. So far, over 260 chefs across multiple provinces have benefited from this initiative.

At the certification ceremony at the Limpopo Chefs Academy, Tshitereke Matibe, Limpopo MEC of the Department of Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism, praised the chefs and encouraged them to use their qualifications to benefit their communities.

"Government development programmes are crucial in building a skilled tourism workforce and empowering emerging entrepreneurs. The skills gained through the RPL programme will elevate your careers and allow you to contribute meaningfully to your communities," he said.

"South Africa's tourism sector needs your talent, creativity, and leadership. Today, we celebrate your achievements. Tomorrow, the world will taste your excellence. May this be the beginning of the rest of your lives," MEC Matibe concluded.

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