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# What do working conditions have to do with clean hotel rooms?

And what can hotels do about it?

A Report by Unia Zürich-Schaffhausen on the  
current situation in Zürich Marriott Hotels

« We are supposed to clean everything with the same detergent. This detergent is poisonous. It should only be used in the bath and rinsed with a lot of water. Of course, this is not done with wood floors and furniture. I would not walk around this hotel room barefoot. »

**Petra\*, hotel housekeeper, Sheraton Zürich West, Zürich, June 2018**

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Unia as a union in the catering, hotels and cleaning industry represents the interests of its approximately 18,000 members in these sectors. From countless contacts and conversations, a picture emerges of an industry in which the interests of the workers take second place. This report gives concrete examples of the precarious everyday reality of the staff and how this affects hotel guests.

The names of all the people quoted are known to Unia Zürich-Schaffhausen. To protect them from reprisals, they have been changed. The changes are marked with an asterisk.

# What do working conditions have to do with clean hotel rooms?

**The Swiss hotel industry is particularly prone to breaching the provisions of the collective agreement and employment law. Many hotels respond to the growing competition with price squeezes and outsourcing. The working conditions of the workers and service quality for the guests suffer.“**

Mauro Moretto, branch official of the Unia hotels and catering union.

The hotel industry has changed enormously. New business models, decoupling of owners and operators, systematic outsourcing and the resulting ambiguous responsibilities have led to a situation in which time pressure and savings, stress and breach of the applicable collective agreements are the order of the day. The following inside reports from employees of

various hotels in the Marriott Group in Zürich show what these developments mean in their daily routine.

« We often have to wash glasses with the same detergent as the toilet. »

**Fabienne\*, hotel housekeeper, Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel, June 2018**

The time allowed to clean a hotel room is directly linked to its cleanliness. Or to put it more generally: working conditions are directly connected to the quality of the work performed. And because this is about health and safety issues, it directly affects the hotel guests.

## Marriott: The industry giant

Marriott International Inc., with over 30 brands, is the biggest hotel chain in the world. It operates hotels in 121 countries with a total of over 1,200,000 rooms. As the industry leader, Marriott also sets the standard for division of labour and acts as a beacon for the industry as a whole.

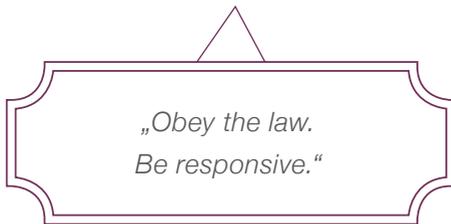
The following Zürich hotels belong to the Marriott International Inc. chain:

- Zürich Marriott Hotel
- Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel
- Courtyard by Marriott Zurich North
- Hotel Atlantis by Giardino
- Four points by Sheraton Sihlcity
- Sheraton Zürich West
- Sheraton Zürich Neues Schloss Hotel
- Kameha Grand Zürich



# The daily routine for hotel housekeepers: Violations, stress, exploitation and abuse

4 The stories encountered by Unia Zürich-Schaffhausen in the last few months echo each other and paint a clear picture of an industry. In all the hotels, all areas are outsourced. Unfortunately, outsourcing of cleaning has become the norm. The business model of many cleaning firms is based on price competition, which results in unmanageable, unrealistic times allowed for room cleaning and inadequate staffing levels. In particular, staff with long experience of hotel cleaning describe a trend in which fewer and fewer staff have to clean faster and faster, to keep costs as low as possible.



Source: Marriott Business Conduct Guide. Our Tradition of Integrity.<sup>1</sup>

Routine breaches of the rules under the collective agreement, such as compliance with reasonable rest times and breaks are an everyday fact of life for cleaning staff in the Marriott Group hotels in Zürich.

« „In December, just 12 housekeepers were responsible for cleaning the 300 rooms and the hotel was always pretty full. Guests sometimes had to wait three hours for their room. The housekeepers worked up to 19 hours a day.“ »

**Maria\*, hotel housekeeper, Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel, Zürich, June 2018**

« We only have 15 minutes to clean a room. And we don't just have to clean the room, but also change glasses, towels and extra bed linen, etc. The working conditions are not fair.“ »

**Martha\*, hotel housekeeper, Kameha Grand Zürich, Zürich, June 2018**

« 10 minutes are allowed to clean a normal room, so 6 rooms an hour must be cleaned. This means that we have to work really fast. If we don't manage it, we are threatened. It's stressful! »

**Adriana\*, hotel housekeeper, Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel, Zürich, June 2018**

« In January, I worked approximately 250 hours, an average of 12 or 13 hours a day. Between January and March, I only had two weekends off. And I've got children at home. »

**Luisa\*, hotel housekeeper, Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel, Zürich, June 2018**

Feedback like this from hotel housekeepers contradicts the rules in the collective agreement concerning them.<sup>2</sup>

6.2

*Full-time working hours is a maximum of 42 hours per week.*

(...)

*Overtime, which exceeds the maximum weekly working time under Art. 6.2, must be paid with a premium of 25% where the overtime is not compensated by 30 April of the following year.*

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« In my job interview, I was told that I would have 30 minutes to clean a room. In fact, we only had 10 minutes. That is simply not enough for filthy rooms. We have found used condoms in wardrobes, there were routinely blocked pipes, because we did not have time to clean the drain from the bathtub and we even found rubbish stashed in the headboard and so on. My colleagues and I were told that we would receive our first pay only two months after we started work. That was not what it said in my contract. »

**Moira\*, hotel housekeeper, Zürich Marriott Hotel, Zürich, June 2018**



Source: Marriott Business Conduct Guide. Our Tradition of Integrity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott\\_Business\\_Conduct\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott_Business_Conduct_Guide_English.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Collective Employment Agreement for the Cleaning Sector in German-speaking Switzerland 2016/2017. Stated as generally binding under the Federal Council decision of 15 January 2018.

6 The same pressure also has an impact on staff health.

« A couple of months ago, I had ear problems with a lot of pain. Despite the pain and the strong antibiotics, I carried on working, because my boss forced me to. »

**Susanna\*, hotel housekeeper, Sheraton Zürich West, Zürich, June 2018**

The price pressure does not stop with working conditions, but also means that hotel housekeepers have to work with the wrong cleaning materials, because they are cheaper. Staff again and again tell of health risks in the workplace, because of a lack of gloves and they are constantly forced to use caustic and volatile cleaning materials, which are only permitted for the bathroom areas, for the whole room. Negligent use of cleaning materials endangers not only the housekeepers' health but also that of the guests.

« We use unsuitable cleaning materials. To clean the mirrors, for example, we cut up old towels or bed sheets. »

**Betty\*, hotel housekeeper, Kameha Grand Zürich, Zürich, 2018**

« We are supposed to clean everything with the same detergent. This detergent is poisonous. It should only be used in the bath and rinsed with a lot of water. Of course, this is not done with wood floors and furniture. I would not walk around this hotel room barefoot. »

**Petra\*, hotel housekeeper, Sheraton Zürich West, Zürich, June 2018**

« We do not have enough cleaning material. Drugs and syringes have been found in the rooms. If we have no gloves, cleaning the room is very dangerous for our health. »

**Vera\*, hotel housekeeper, Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel, Zürich, June 2018**

This reality is also in breach of the collective agreement for the cleaning sector.<sup>3</sup>

## 11. Accident prevention

### 11.1

*The company takes the necessary measures to protect employees. The preventive measures required by the responsible authorities are implemented. Employees inform their employer and its representative of defects in materials or equipment which they discover.*

*The employer is required to immediately make the necessary resources available in sufficient quantity and for work where there is a risk of accidents to provide the necessary first-aid facilities.*



*«As a company the globe, Marriott strives to create a safe, fair, and harassment-free workplace for our associates and a safe, secure, and hospitable environment for our customers.»*

Source: Marriott Business Conduct Guide. Our Tradition of Integrity.<sup>4</sup>

Staff in the hotel industry are unfortunately especially exposed to sexual abuse and even sexual violence in their everyday routine. Housekeepers in Marriott Group hotels are not adequately protected from sexual harassment and an adequate approach to the subject is lacking.

## Facts and figures on the cleaning industry in the Canton of Zürich

- Number of employees: 14,012
- Employees by sex:  
Women: 9,971  
Men: 4,041
- Number of worksites: 1,101
- Hourly wage under the Collective Employment Agreement for the Cleaning Sector in German-speaking Switzerland: CHF 18.80

Source: BFS – Corporate Structure Statistics (STATENT)  
- ©BFS

<sup>3</sup> Collective Employment Agreement for the Cleaning Sector in German-speaking Switzerland 2016/2017. Stated as generally binding under the Federal Council decision of 15 January 2018.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott\\_Business\\_Conduct\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott_Business_Conduct_Guide_English.pdf)

« While I was in the room, the man pushed me on to the bed. I wanted to get out of the room at once. The man gripped my arm and tried to push me back on the bed. Then my colleague came and helped me to get out of the room. We immediately informed our boss. She talked to the hotel manager, but I had to keep on working, although I wanted to go home. The subject never came up again in the hotel! »

**Martha\*, hotel housekeeper, Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel, Zürich, June 2018**

« One day, one of my colleagues was dragged into the room by a guest and the guest wanted to pay for sexual services. Somehow my colleague managed to get free and stormed down to the lobby. My boss, who happened to be there, immediately shouted at my colleague that she should pull herself together. My boss then told me to take my colleague away and make sure that she did not „make a drama“ out of it. »

**Haxhera\*, hotel housekeeper, Renaissance Zürich Tower Hotel, Zürich, June 2018**

The collective employment agreement governs personal protection in the workplace; here too Marriott does not adequately fulfil its contractual obligations.<sup>5</sup>

#### *18. Personal protection*

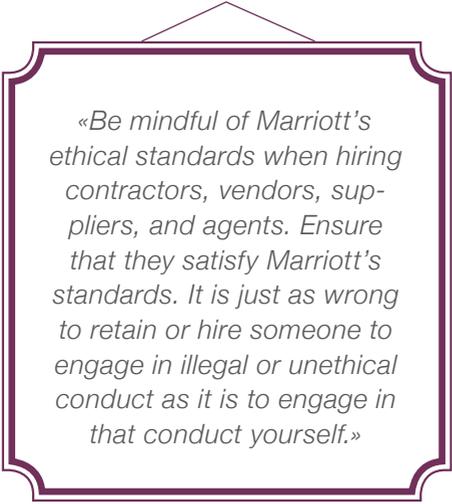
*Staff are entitled to comprehensive personal protection in the workplace. In the event of illegal or inappropriate treatment by supervisors or other employees, the victims have the right to complain.*

*In particular, any form of sexual harassment (physical, verbal, visual) and bullying or racist behaviour in the workplace is strictly prohibited.*

<sup>5</sup> Collective Employment Agreement for the Cleaning Sector in German-speaking Switzerland 2016/2017. Stated as generally binding under the Federal Council decision of 15 January 2018.

# Importance of responsibility and compliance with the rules throughout the supply chain

The official Business Conduct Guide is clear: Marriott declares that it is a responsible and fair employer. Marriott quite explicitly states that this responsibility applies to the whole supply chain, thus to operators and subcontractors. This is especially important in the light of the Marriott Group's increasingly complex business model. In order to take responsibility and maintain standards, Marriott needs to be able to exert direct influence.



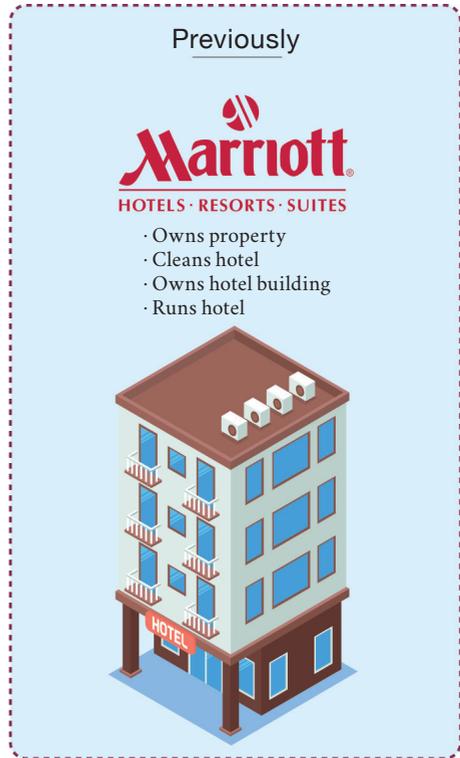
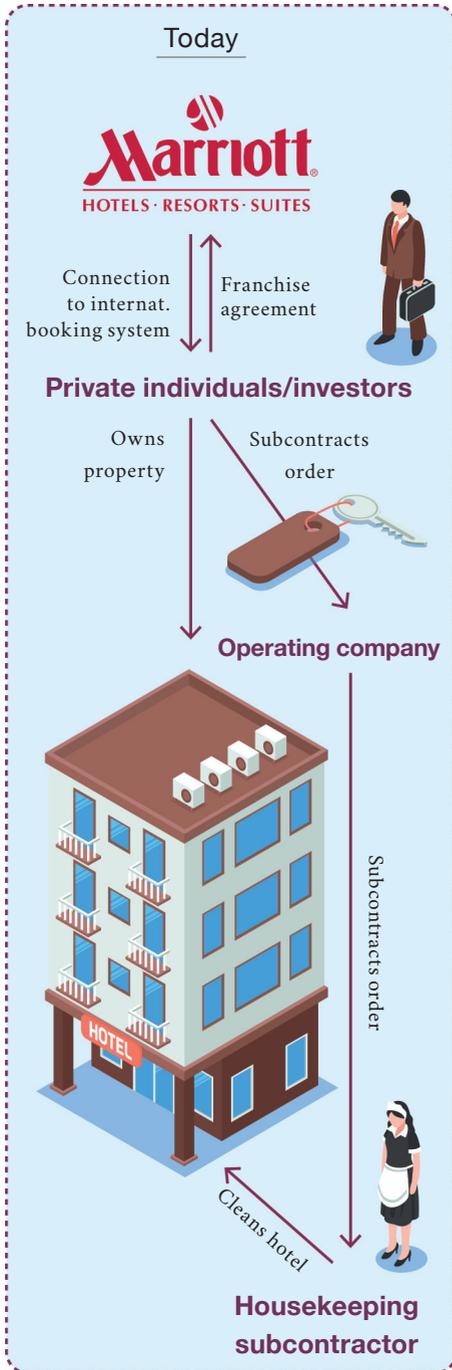
*«Be mindful of Marriott's ethical standards when hiring contractors, vendors, suppliers, and agents. Ensure that they satisfy Marriott's standards. It is just as wrong to retain or hire someone to engage in illegal or unethical conduct as it is to engage in that conduct yourself.»*

Marriott Business Conduct Guide. Our Tradition of Integrity<sup>6</sup>

The situation in the hotel market in Zürich is increasingly out of control. The cascade of (property) owners, operators, outsourced entities and subcontractors is increasingly reminiscent of the subcontractor supply chains and wage-dumping arrangements in the construction industry, with the resulting consequences for employees.

The accounts of hotel housekeepers are not consistent with either the current collective employment agreement or the Marriott Business Conduct Guide. There are no „regrettable“ isolated incidents, as we found. Far rather, the accounts paint a picture of an industry where the system is such that even the major players can no longer enforce the requirements of the collective employment agreement and the law throughout the supply chain. This raises major questions about the health and safety of guests and employees. There is a downward spiral of price competition and poor working conditions.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott\\_Business\\_Conduct\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott_Business_Conduct_Guide_English.pdf)



While Marriott International Inc. was originally the owner and operator of almost all the hotels bearing its name, the picture today is quite different. None of the eight „Marriott Hotels“ in Zürich are directly owned by Marriott International Inc. The property owners – private, investment funds, etc. – establish a franchise agreement with Marriott. The management of the hotel is then passed on to another firm which takes charge of the business operations. The latter then further outsources the housekeeping to a subcontractor. The role of Marriott Inc. is limited to providing the brand name and access to the international booking and award system and, in principle, to setting the rules for the operation of the business. Marriott earns its money from the franchise agreement.

# Marriott stands for responsibility – Marriott sets standards



Marriott Business Conduct Guide. Our Tradition of Integrity.<sup>7</sup>

As the largest hotel company in the world, Marriott has a responsibility to stop this spiral. Marriott must ensure that the applicable rules are respected and its own undertakings and requirements concerning working conditions and ethics are applied throughout the entire supply chain.

It is unacceptable that Marriott should hide behind complex constructs or simply relinquish control and no longer enforce rules and contracts.

To that end, Marriott must directly hire the staff of its hotels. Only then can the rules and regulations and the daily routine of housekeepers be duly restored. And thanks to good working conditions, good quality will again be ensured in all its hotels.



Marriott Business Conduct Guide. Our Tradition of Integrity.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott\\_Business\\_Conduct\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](https://www.marriott.com/Multimedia/PDF/CorporateResponsibility/Marriott_Business_Conduct_Guide_English.pdf)

