

## **The chief inspector of the cleaning industry**

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**"We find breaches in 50 percent of cases"**

The Parity Commission in charge of maintaining order in the cleaning industry finds breaches in half of all inspections. The reason, according to chief inspector Claudia Hablützel, is that many companies are overextended and unable to cope.

**BLICK: Ms Hablützel, both the industry association Allpura and the trade union Unia have this week made public statements shifting the focus onto the problematic hotel-cleaning sector. Why does this sector have so many problems?**

**Claudia Hablützel:** The competition among cleaning companies is fierce. The cheapest offer will often get you a contract at a hotel, and contenders are pitted against one another. Coupled with the uncertainty associated with the fact that hotel jobs are difficult for cleaning companies to calculate in advance, this leads to problems.

**Hotels would benefit a lot by paying the cleaning companies more.**

Competition has also grown among hotels; the number of beds has been constantly growing for years, especially in the cities. So the hotels are also quick to exploit market conditions to their own benefit when it comes to purchasing cleaning services.

**So it's understandable that many larger respectable cleaning companies have stopped working for hotels.**

We have also noticed this trend. But it's not our job to evaluate it. In general, it is easier to calculate and plan costs for, say, office cleaning. Many companies who have been in the market for some time have gathered their own experiences and drawn their own conclusions from the difficulties that have arisen. But there are also companies with lots of experience and expertise in hotel cleaning which operate without any problems.

**Many of the smaller hotel-cleaning companies, on the other hand, seem overextended and unable to cope.**

Many think they just need a bucket and a bottle of cleaning agent to run a cleaning company. Then they simply set up a Facebook page with a mobile number and they're in the market. Many operators have no business training and little idea about accounting or how to cost a job. This means that some employers aren't up to it – and you see this in other industries as well. The employees notice it, and sometimes so do we.

**How do these companies survive?**

Many don't survive for long. Around 300 of Switzerland's 3000 companies disappear every year, and 300 new ones are founded. A certain degree of know-how is required in order for a business to survive.

**The hotel housekeepers are the worst off.**

Many of them need their job because they come from low-wage countries and often have no vocational training. They are more reluctant to stand up for themselves for fear of losing their job. They often don't even know their rights.

**They can contact you, the Parity Commission, to lodge a complaint. What happens then?**

We assess the complaints to see if they are warranted. If we find something has not been done correctly, we carry out an inspection of the company and ask the employer to repay outstanding wages and improve its practices. In some cases, at the employee's request, we will also contact the employer to explain the legal situation to them, and ask them to take corrective action regarding the employee in question.

**You also perform checks that aren't requested by exploited housemaids. What do you find in these cases?**

We find breaches in around 50 percent of the inspections we conduct across the entire cleaning industry. In around half of the non-conforming businesses the breaches are minor – the rest are moderate to serious. Repeated or more serious breaches found during our inspections are punished with penalties for non-performance.

*Lawyer*

**Claudia Hablützel**

*Lawyer Claudia Hablützel (46) heads the office of the Parity Commission for the cleaning industry. The Commission consists of seven representatives of companies and employees. One of its tasks is to conduct inspections to ensure the industry's collective employment contract is observed.*