

Working conditions at hotels in Turkey still poor – despite sustainability certification

The sustainability certification of your holiday hotel does not necessarily guarantee fair working conditions for the employees. In spite of Travelife certification, workers are hindered from joining a union, deprived of overtime compensation and their wage does not cover basic living expenses. These findings are presented today in a new report from the Swedish Fair Travel network.

At the ten examined hotels in Turkish Alanya, low wages, unlawful denial of overtime pay and a widespread fear of joining a union were as common at the certified accommodations as at the non-Travelife certified hotels.

Travelife is a certification that includes criteria for environmental management, fair working conditions and community integration, owned by the British travel association ABTA. All of the ten hotels in the study are contracted by one or more of the tour operators Apollo (Kuoni), Fritidsresor (TUI) and Ving (Thomas Cook). The tour operators promote Travelife as an important part of their commitment to sustainability.

– The findings truly question the quality and credibility of the Travelife standard. The tour operators must make sure that the standard guarantees fair working conditions, otherwise they will lose the trust of the customers, says Maria Sjödin, Acting Director at Fair Trade Center, that compiled the report.

The majority of the 33 hotel workers that were interviewed for the study claim that they can't support themselves and their family on their wage. The hotel housekeepers – who are almost exclusively women – generally earn only the minimum wage of about 288 Euros, which is far below the cost for basic living expenses in the area. Many work long hours and report that they do not have time for breaks. More than half of the interviewees are deprived of overtime pay, despite this being a violation of Turkish law. Furthermore, the workers have very limited possibilities for demanding better conditions, since many employers seek to prevent unionization. At seven out of ten hotels in the study workers allege that they would be fired if they were to join a union.

Seven of the hotels in the study were investigated by the Swedish Fair Travel network already in 2012, and the tour operators were strongly criticized. It is now clear that the situation has hardly improved at all.

– It is surprising that the tour operators have not managed to deal with the problems, says Pim van Dorpel, Vice President at the Swedish Hotel- and Restaurant Workers Union.

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The Swedish fair travel network (Schyst resande) consists of seven organizations – Unionen, Fair Trade Center, the Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, the Church of Sweden, Church of Sweden Youth, Union to Union and the IOGT-NTO movement. The network believes that tourism can contribute to sustainable development, but only if travelers and the tourism industry takes responsibility for their social, economic and environmental impacts.