

German women report string of sexual assaults by 'Arab and North African men'

From [Germany](#) are investigating an alarming series of sexual assaults on women trying to celebrate the New Year by large groups of single men "of Arab or North African appearance".

Authorities in the city of Cologne are to hold a crisis meeting on Tuesday after police described a group of some 1,000 men who took over the area around the main station on New Year's Eve.

Women were robbed, groped, and had their underwear torn from their bodies, while couples had fireworks thrown at them.

Police have received 90 criminal complaints, around a quarter of them for sexual assault, including one case of rape.

Police in Hamburg say there was a series of similar incidents in the city's Reeperbahn red-light area. Witnesses described groups of five to 15 men of who "hunted" women in the streets.

In Cologne, the attacks took place around the main station, opposite the cathedral, a traditional gathering spot to see in the New Year.

A 27-year-old witness named only as Anne told [Express newspaper](#). "Crying and in shock they described how they had been severely sexually harrassed. We went to look for women in the crowd. I picked one up from the ground. She was screaming and crying. Her underwear had been torn from her body."

There were allegations of a police “cover-up” on social media after it took five days for the scale of the incidents to emerge, with some claiming the authorities wanted to hide the ethnicity of the perpetrators to avoid social tensions.

An unidentified male witness told WDR television he and his girlfriend had been surrounded in Cologne by “drunk and aggressive” men who threatened them and groped her. “They weren’t of European appearance,” he said.

“The crimes were committed by a group of people who from appearance were largely from the North African or Arab world,” Wolfgang Albers, the Cologne police chief, told a press conference. “It is intolerable that such offences are committed in the heart of the city,” he said.

In Hamburg, witnesses described groups of young men who followed women calling out “Bitch! Ficky ficky!”

The state government of North Rhine-Westphalia, where Cologne lies, vowed to take action. “We will not take gangs of North African men humiliating defenceless women with brazen sexual attacks,” Ralf Jäger, the state’s interior minister, said.