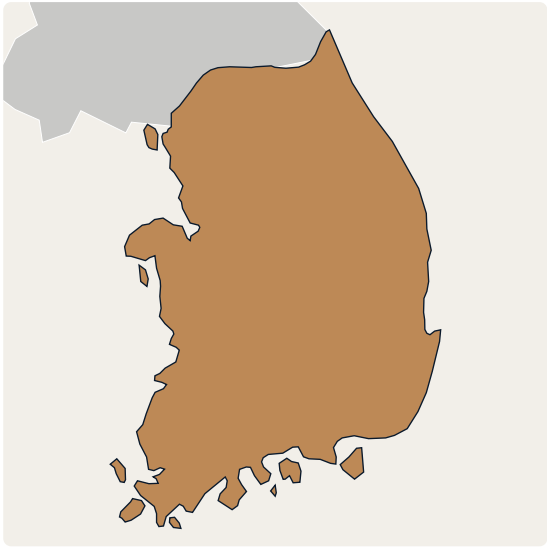
South Korea

Population 51.7 million · Latest figures: 2025



South Korea's police recorded 122,106 scam cases with losses in 2025, and 8.96 trillion won lost. Online scams other than buying and selling were 98,746 cases and 7.70 trillion won, more than double the 3.37 trillion won of 2024, led by investment, romance and other scams that build trust over months. Voice phishing was 23,360 cases and 1.26 trillion won: impersonation of an institution 13,323 cases and 988.4 billion won, fake loan offers 10,037 cases and 269.4 billion won.

Voice phishing turned down sharply. From October 2025 to July 2026 police counted 12,554 cases and 632.4 billion won, 39.9% fewer cases and 43.2% less money than a year earlier. In the first half of 2026 the figures were 7,033 cases and 327.6 billion won, down 61.0% and 52.3%.

A government-wide task force chaired by the Office for Government Policy Coordination leads the response, with the police's integrated response centre, the Financial Services Commission and Financial Supervisory Service, the science ministry, the communications commission and the personal information commission. The main laws of the last three years raised the maximum sentence for mass-victim scams to 30 years, let courts confiscate scam proceeds without a conviction, fined illegal spam operators up to 6% of related revenue, banned caller-ID spoofing relays, and brought crypto assets into the refund scheme from 1 October 2026.

PEOPLE SCAMMED

2,063,041

4.6% of adults

The 2024 Korean Crime Victim Survey found 4,583 scams for every 100,000 people, up from 3,329 in 2022. Women were more than twice as likely as men to be victims, 3.1% against 1.5%. Victimisation rose with age, to 3.4% among people in their 60s and 2.9% in their 50s, and people aged 50 and over were 46.8% of scam victims. Among online scam victims, 60.2% were women and the 20s, 30s and 40s together made up 62.2%.

Most scams reach people by phone, text or messaging app. In the 2024 survey, 35.8% of online scams were a second-hand direct deal paid for but not delivered, 21.7% was a government body or bank impersonated to induce a transfer, 21.7% was goods bought in an online shop and not delivered, and 16.7% was a family member or friend impersonated. The rest included fake bank or public sites used to capture financial details, unauthorised use of a bank account and false child kidnapping demands.

Scammers match the script to the victim. In the 2023 relief data, 85.2% of victims in their 20s or younger were caught by government or public body impersonation, while 62.9% of victims in their 30s and 69.1% in their 40s were caught by fake loan offers. People in their 50s and over were most often caught by messenger phishing posing as family or friends. The newer scams are investment reading rooms, romance scams and no-show scams, and many gangs run them from Southeast Asia. A Korean police task force in Cambodia arrested 217 suspects in the latest operation.

PEOPLE WHO LOST MONEY

1,395,522

68% of victims

Most of the money leaves by bank transfer. In the 2023 relief data, bank accounts received 72.1% of the money reported lost and non-bank accounts 27.9%; internet-only banks were 10.0% of the total, down from 20.9% in 2022. The receiving accounts are usually borrowed or bought from other people: from September 2025 to July 2026 police caught 16,917 people who made or supplied these mule accounts and phone lines. A growing share is converted to crypto.

Crypto is now a main route. Between June and September 2025 crypto exchanges handled 2,526 accounts used in scams and 2,257억 원; 1,490 accounts, 59.0% of the cases, and 1,705억 원, 75.5% of the money, qualified for an exception to the exchange withdrawal delay. Exchanges adopted a unified, tighter delay standard in April 2026.

What stops a payment is speed. A report to the police's integrated response centre lets officers ask the receiving bank to suspend the account, and the ASAP platform shares suspect records among about 130 financial companies, police and the Financial Security Institute in real time. In its first 12 weeks ASAP suspended 2,705 accounts and prevented 186.5억 원 of loss. Police can block a scam phone number within 10 minutes, with 115,088 numbers cut by July 2026. Telecoms and Samsung run AI call screening that warns of voice phishing, the science ministry blocks malicious links and app installs, and card companies now watch gift-card payments for signs of a scam.

MONEY LOST

US$6.58b

₩9.35tn in a year, 0.35% of GDP

Money comes back from what is left in the receiving account, not from the scammer. In 2023, 652억 원 of the 1,965억 원 claimed through the relief scheme was paid to victims, 33.2%, up from 26.1% in 2022. The share improved after the integrated reporting centre opened in September 2023 and payment suspensions became faster.

The telecom fraud refund act sets the route. A victim asks the bank to suspend the receiving account and then applies for damage relief at the branch with the police incident certificate and other documents. Where the request was made by phone, the documents must reach the branch within three business days. Money is returned from the frozen balance; the rest depends on what is recovered from the account holder. Card payments are different: a payment can be cancelled where the merchant's sale was false, while a transfer the victim authorised is much harder to reverse.

Several schemes sit on top. Seven banks offer free compensation insurance covering 3 million to 11 million won for voice phishing losses. The Financial Intelligence Unit can suspend accounts in romance, investment and no-show scams, and 5,018 of 6,914 reported accounts were suspended between 30 June and 21 August 2026. From 1 October 2026 the refund act covers crypto assets: a victim is repaid in crypto, or the crypto is sold by a designated institution and the money paid out. From October 2025 to July 2026 the ASAP platform prevented 663.6억 원 from being taken in the first place.

MONEY RETURNED

US$2.18b

33.2% of the money lost

US$2.18b (₩3.11tn) of it was returned to victims, 33.2% of the money lost. Much of it is likely to be refunds paid by banks and card issuers rather than money recovered from the scammers.

REPORTED

48%

of victims reported it

In the 2024 national crime victim survey, 19.7% of scam victims told the police, the same rate as in 2022 and 2020. Reporting has a single front door: the police's integrated response centre, opened in October 2025, takes reports continuously and answers about 98% of calls, against about 60% before it opened. A single police number became the main line in February 2026, and calls to the emergency number and the financial regulator's line connect to the same centre.

Behind the centre, each channel has its own job. Banks take requests to suspend a receiving account and claims for damage relief. The Financial Supervisory Service supervises those claims. The Korea Internet and Security Agency works with police on the technical blocks, the communications commission takes spam reports, and Naver, Kakao and Line block accounts that police refer. The financial sector's ASAP platform carries suspect account and phone data between about 130 companies, police and the Financial Security Institute.

The counts show the volume. Police recorded 98,746 online scam cases outside buying and selling and 23,360 voice phishing cases in 2025, and 7,033 voice phishing cases in the first half of 2026. Urgent blocking cut 65,638 phone lines by April 2026 and 115,088 by July, and police blocked 53,000 SNS accounts and sent 51,000 risk alerts in 2026. Voice phishing reports and losses have fallen together: cases were 39.9% lower and money 43.2% lower in the ten months to July 2026 than a year earlier.

POLICE RECORDS

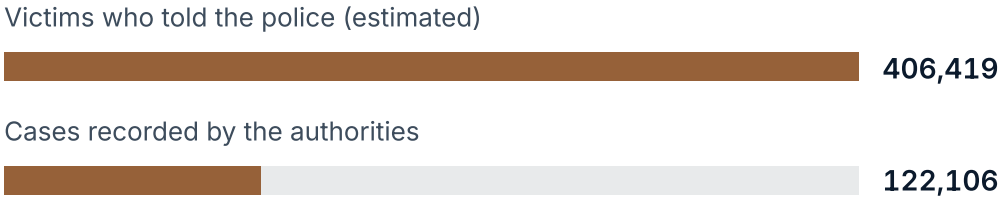
122,106

cases recorded by the authorities

The figure shown is two National Police Agency series for 2025: 122,106 cases with 8.96 trillion won lost. Online scams other than buying and selling, covering Ponzi schemes, phishing and scams run online, were 98,746 cases and 7.7021 trillion won, a provisional count the agency gave the National Assembly. Voice phishing was 23,360 cases and 1.2578 trillion won: impersonation of an institution 13,323 cases and 988.4 billion won, fake loan offers 10,037 cases and 269.4 billion won.

Both series count cases the police recognise, not reports. The agency's cybercrime file records 267,061 online scam cases of every kind in 2025; about half are second-hand, shopping and gaming deals, which sit outside the figure.

Enforcement has widened. From September 2025 to July 2026 police arrested 38,577 phishing suspects, 18.4% more than a year earlier, and 16,917 people who made or supplied mule accounts and phones. Prosecutors indicted 313 people and detained 154. Police preserved 40.7 billion won of scam proceeds before indictment in the first four months of 2026. In Cambodia a Korean task force arrested 217 suspects, rescued 8 victims and repatriated 137 fugitives, and operations abroad arrested 405 gang members and repatriated 274. Cases are brought as fraud under the criminal act and under the special act on telecom scams, and a 2026 amendment allows up to 30 years for scams with many victims.



MOST COMMON

1. Online shopping
2. Prizes
3. Investment

Impersonation of an institution is the largest voice phishing type: 13,323 cases and 988.4 billion won in 2025. Callers pose as prosecutors, police, the financial regulator or a bank, say the victim is tied to a crime or an account is at risk, and direct savings to another account. Fake loan offers were 10,037 cases and 269.4 billion won: a caller offers credit and asks for a fee, or for repayment of an existing loan, before any money is lent.

Online scams are broader. In the police cybercrime file, direct second-hand deals were 119,741 cases, other online scams 94,398, investment scams 27,034, gaming 9,521, shopping 9,173, romance 6,976 and email trade scams 218. The victim survey finds the same mix: 35.8% of online scams were a second-hand deal paid for but not delivered or the wrong goods sent, 21.7% a government body or bank impersonated to induce a transfer, and 16.7% a family member or friend impersonated. Counterfeit goods were 27.8% of scams in the survey, prize bait 9.5% and investment scams 5.6%.

Newer types grow through SNS and messaging apps. Investment reading rooms run chat groups that push victims towards fake trading apps and sites. Romance scams build a relationship before asking for money or crypto. No-show scams use public procurement contracts to order goods and disappear. Police and platforms blocked 53,000 SNS accounts used for these scams in 2026.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

A government-wide task force chaired by the Office for Government Policy Coordination runs the response. Its core is the police's integrated response centre, with 10 staff from six agencies working side by side. The Financial Services Commission's ASAP platform, live since October 2025, shares scam data among about 130 financial companies, police and the Financial Security Institute. Police block a scam number in under 10 minutes, the science ministry blocks malicious links and app installs, the carriers and Samsung put AI call screening on by default, and police work with Naver, Kakao and Line to close scam accounts.

The results are clearest for voice phishing. Its cases and money fell for ten months from October 2025 to July 2026, by 39.9% and 43.2% against a year earlier, and in the first half of 2026 by 61.0% and 52.3%. ASAP prevented 663.6 billion won from being taken. Online scams outside buying and selling went the other way: 7.70 trillion won lost in 2025, more than double 2024.

Recovery and liability are the gaps. In 2023 only 33.2% of the money claimed through the relief scheme was returned, and crypto sat outside the scheme until 1 October 2026. Bank compensation insurance is voluntary and covers 3 million to 11 million won. A bill to make banks liable where they were not at fault has not passed, a bill against mass-victim scams is before the National Assembly, and platform duties rest on voluntary agreements with Naver and Kakao.

Calculation Methodology & Sources

People scammed

From one survey:

- 4.6%: Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice, Korean Crime Victim Survey 2024 (nationwide crime victimisation survey, research series 25-B-02), Korean abstract, property crime victimisation by type (사기 4,583 per 100,000 in 2024) (2024).
- 4.6% of 45,015,088 adults.

People who lost money

- Borrowed from Indonesia, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam: 67.6%. Average of the shares measured in Indonesia (60.0%), India (65.5%), Malaysia (72.4%), the Philippines (80.8%), Singapore (58.1%), Thailand (79.2%) and Vietnam (57.6%).

Money lost

- ₩8.96tn was lost in cases recorded by the authorities. Adding the 1,273,416 victims who lost money but are not in those records, at ₩310,012 each, gives ₩9.35tn.
- Price of an unrecorded loss: Read off the line fitted to GDP per person in the countries where this price is measured (Canada, Chile, Mexico, Singapore and United States): US$217.94 = KRW 310,012.14.
- US dollars at 0.000703017 per KRW.
- Share of GDP: US$6.58b against GDP of US$1.87tn in 2025. World Bank, GDP (current US$) 2025.

Money returned

- Financial Supervisory Service, 2023 voice phishing damage analysis, Page 2, 2023 voice phishing damage table.
- Returned to victims in 2023, the latest year published: 652억 원 of the 1,965억 원 claimed through the relief scheme.
- 33.2% of ₩9.35tn lost.

Reported

- Borrowed from Indonesia, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam: 48.0%. Estimated: the lowest of the shares measured by the non-government survey: Indonesia (48.0%), India (87.9%), Malaysia (55.2%), the Philippines (76.9%), Singapore (87.1%), Thailand (75.0%) and Vietnam (65.2%).

Police records

- 19.7%: Korean Institute of Criminology and Justice, Korean Crime Victim Survey 2024 (nationwide crime victimisation survey, research series 25-B-02), Korean abstract, property crime reporting rates (사기 19.7% in 2024) (2024).
- 23,360: Voice phishing cases recorded by the National Police Agency (telecommunications financial fraud: impersonation of an institution and fake loan offers).
- 98,746: Online scam cases recorded by the National Police Agency, other than buying and selling (non-transaction cyber economic crime: Ponzi schemes, phishing and scams run online).

Most common

- Ranked by kinds of fraud in the national crime victimisation survey (Korean Crime Victim Survey 2024). 54.6% of answers are methods such as phishing, or other, and are not ranked.

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