

# R♥mance Scams on the Rise

*We've heard so many tragic stories...*

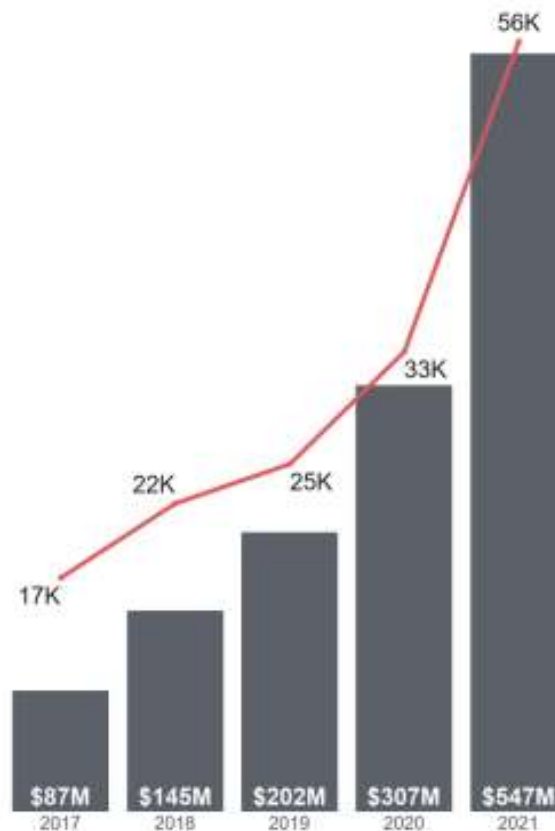
"I'm marrying a handsome airline pilot I met online last week and sending my life's savings to him in Germany for the house we're buying together..."

"My boyfriend/girlfriend, who I met online a few months ago, told me how to invest in cryptocurrency and make a boatload of money. I invested \$50,000 and now it's worth \$1 million! I just have to send a bunch of money to pay some taxes and fees..."

"I've been in a long-distance relationship with a humanitarian aid worker in Afghanistan I met on Facebook, who is desperate to get out of the country. She needed me to send \$10,000 USD to pay the people helping her get home..."

## Reports about romance scams: Growth over five years

2021 total reported losses were more than 6 times what they were in 2017, and the number of reports grew to more than 3 times the 2017 number.



Figures based on fraud reports to the FTC's Consumer Sentinel Network that were classified as romance scams. Reports provided by the Internet Crimes Complaint Center are excluded.

Source: Federal Trade Commission - "Reports of romance scams hit record highs in 2021"  
By: Emma Fletcher | Feb 10, 2022



Social media was initially, and for many still is, an amazing way to stay connected with family and friends. With the explosion of online dating sites, many people have also legitimately found love and happiness. Sadly, these online connection channels also offer up a smorgasbord of “vulnerables” to online predators who can easily profile likely targets for their lies, deceit and fraud. Widespread isolation and loneliness brought on by the COVID pandemic, now two years in, significantly magnified the problem.



A Data Spotlight Report from the Federal Trade Commission reveals that romance scams reached a record \$547 million in losses during 2021, following \$304 million in 2020. Over the past five years the FTC has received reports of individuals losing \$1.3 billion in romance scams, more than any other FTC reported fraud category.

On February 7, 2022, FinCEN issued a joint release[1] in conjunction with four other federal agencies, including the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), launching “*Dating or Defrauding?*”, a national campaign to continue to raise awareness and alert the public to romance scams targeting victims through social media or dating apps. As reported by the FTC, many scams originated through direct messaging in applications such as Facebook and Instagram. The campaign aims to reach the public via social media and local and national media outreach to encourage vigilance when initiating online relationships.

### What are the Signs?

What can we look for when determining whether fraud is actually taking place? Many resources, including the FTIC, FinCEN, and USPIS, all provide many information red flags on identifying such activity:

- A contact’s name and the name embedded in an email address does not match
- Obvious spelling and grammar errors
- The online profile suddenly disappears from the dating site
- They pledge their loves way too quickly
- They ask the potential victim to send or receive money/packages
- They need a Visa or plane tickets
- They need money right away because of a medical or family emergency (also includes travel expenses for a family funeral)
- They claim a new business

FinCEN specifically provided additional red flags during the pandemic relating to the use of “money mules,” or an individual “who transfers illegally acquired money on behalf of or at the direction of another.” While the advisory listed several red flags related to imposter and money mule scams, FI’s should be aware when a customer states, or a review indicates, an individual the customer did not know previously has requested any financial assistance in sending or receiving funds through the customer’s account.

FinCEN has also provided information to the public regarding the Rapid Response Program (RRP) which was formed in 2015. The program is a partnership between FinCEN, U.S law enforcement (including the FBI), Homeland Security Investigations, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, in addition to other foreign partner agencies. According to FinCEN, the RRP has been active in confronting cyber threats in approximately 70 foreign jurisdictions and has the potential to reach even more. In order for the program to be activated, a victim must first contact law enforcement. Victims can do this through the FBI’s Cyber- and Internet-related Crime Complaint Center (IC3) or the nearest United States Secret Service field office. Once a complaint is filed with law enforcement, victims should quickly contact their financial institutions.

At the end of the day, the motives are the same: bad actors are preying on the kindness and sincere hearts of others.

## **Educational Resources for Consumers**

[“What You Need To Know About Romance Scams”](#)

[FDIC Consumer News “Avoiding Scams and Scammers” October 2021](#)

[Money Smart for Older Adults](#)