

Bank of Italy and Caritas train Italy’s debt sentinels

Posted on June 29, 2026 by Alina Trabattoni

ROME — Italy’s central bankers and its parish priests do not share a syllabus. Yet starting last year they began teaching one together, joining forces as financial strain on Italian families deepens. The Bank of Italy and Caritas programme, training volunteers to catch families sliding into debt, is going national this year.

The aim, diocese by diocese, is to turn parish listening centres into a kind of financial first-aid post. About 80 sessions this year have trained more than 350 volunteers in regions including Abruzzo, Tuscany, Veneto and Apulia.

The Bank of Italy is Italy’s central bank. Caritas Italiana is the charitable arm of the country’s bishops. It began in Calabria, 12 dioceses from November 2025 to March 2026, creating *sentinelle* (sentinels).

Istat (Italy’s national statistics institute) put 8.4 percent of households in absolute poverty in 2024, up from 6.4 percent in 2019. A 2023 Bank of Italy survey found more than a third of Italians felt they had too much debt.

Caritas reported helping 282,539 people battling financial strain in 2025, 48 percent more than a decade earlier.

“More and more people are turning to us because of over-indebtedness, the rising cost of living and many new forms of poverty,” says Fabio Stanizzo, director of Caritas Calabria.

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/banca-ditalia-and-caritas-train-italys-debt-sentinels/

In May it reached Lazio, with two Rome sessions at the Bank of Italy “We want a multiplier effect, more informed people, more conscious choices and a greater capacity to face difficulties before they become emergencies,” says Paola Ansuini, who heads communications and financial education at the Bank of Italy.

For Nando dalla Chiesa, who teaches sociology at the University of Milan, the reach is wider than it looks. “At first sight it seems to interest an almost well-off public,” he says. “Instead it cuts across usury, illiteracy about one’s rights and gender exclusion.”

Volunteers also learned to recognise the *conto di base* (basic bank account) that Italian law guarantees to asylum seekers and the homeless, and the warning signs of usury, illegal lending at crippling interest.

For the sociologist Fabio Lo Verde, the value is twofold. “When you are in difficulty, rather than despairing and acting on instinct, it is better to ask for help,” he says. “The tools to get through small or large crises exist, but you do not get through them alone.”

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