

## **COCO PROJECT**

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# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **EMPOWERING RURAL VOICES**

### **Fresh Insights into Human–Wildlife Relations**

Thessaloniki, 18 August 2025

As Europe’s countryside faces mounting challenges –from declining rural populations to the impacts of climate change– the CoCo project is working at the heart of these communities to co-create sustainable solutions for human and large carnivore coexistence.

This summer, CoCo project partner CALLISTO has been on the ground across the Rhodope Mountains, Prespa, and Tzoumerka in Greece, conducting over 65 in-depth interviews with livestock farmers and agricultural workers. These conversations offer a candid look at how rural livelihoods are shaped by encounters with large carnivores such as bears and wolves, and how current wildlife management policies impact everyday life.

### **Understanding the Issues: What Matters Most to Rural Communities**

The comprehensive questionnaire explores key issues: from the real costs and trends of carnivore-related damages, to societal perceptions of farming, relationships with other rural stakeholders and the sense of justice around pastoralism and wildlife interactions. Recognising that farmers’ voices are vital, the project will soon launch an online survey targeting hunters and landowners, broadening the dialogue to reflect the full spectrum of rural perspectives.

### **Research Findings: A Complex Picture of Coexistence**

Findings so far echo recent research published by the CALLISTO team, revealing a nuanced landscape: while many farmers see the value in damage prevention measures, there are clear concerns about gaps in compensation systems and a lack of recognition for the labour involved. Importantly, some see these measures not just as technical fixes, but as part of a wider social experiment, one that demands shared responsibility and fair recognition of costs among all stakeholders.

### **Driving Innovation: Co-Creation and Stakeholder Engagement**

CALLISTO’s work extends beyond research. As coordinators within the CoCo consortium, the team is driving participatory approaches, testing emerging technologies, and facilitating co-creation processes that put stakeholder engagement front and centre. The goal: to ensure rural voices are heard, local needs are met, and innovative solutions are rooted in real-world contexts.

**Quote:**

“Living and working in the countryside is far from the idyllic vision often painted by urban perspectives. Our work is about acknowledging the realities farmers face, highlighting the extra effort and unpredictability involved in damage prevention and showcasing the innovation that emerges from these challenges. By co-authoring smart, practical solutions with farmers and stakeholders, we aim to make them truly rural, grounded in lived experience and local ingenuity.”

**Tasos Hovardas**, Human Dimensions Expert, CALLISTO – Wildlife and Nature Conservation Society

For more information, visit <https://cocoproject.eu/>.