

MACROECONOMIC MOVEMENTS IN SERBIA WITH REFERENCE TO RURAL TOURISM IN 2025

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Abstract: The development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia aims to diversify the rural economy by reducing poverty, improving living standards, preserving the national cultural heritage, protecting the environment and promoting more balanced regional development. In accordance with its enormous potential, the development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia aims to contribute to the general development of tourism in the country. This paper aims to analyze macroeconomic developments in the Republic of Serbia during 2025, with special emphasis on key indicators of economic stability, such as gross domestic product (GDP) growth, inflation, unemployment, trade and investments. The analysis uses the latest data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the National Bank of Serbia, as well as relevant international sources such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission. The goal of the analysis is to present a realistic picture of economic flows in Serbia during the observed year and to assess the conditions for sustainable development in the following period. Special emphasis was placed on the emergence and development of rural tourism as an activity of great importance for the economic revival of rural areas, the reduction of regional inequalities and the encouragement of local self-employment. The paper indicates that, despite global challenges and the influence of external trends, the Serbian economy showed a certain level of resilience in 2025. Moderate GDP growth was recorded, inflation was significantly reduced compared to previous years, while unemployment is decreasing, especially in the service and tourism sectors. At the same time, foreign direct investors are showing interest in new and sustainable branches of the economy, among which rural tourism is gaining an increasing role. The growth in the number of households that are actively involved in tourist activities in rural areas is particularly noticeable, which, together with the increase in the number of overnight stays and larger budget allocations, indicates a positive development trend. The analysis of rural tourism includes its economic effects on local communities, including increasing household income, creating new jobs, improving local infrastructure and reviving traditional crafts and agriculture. The analysis of rural tourism includes its economic effects on local communities, including increasing household income, creating new jobs, improving local infrastructure and reviving traditional crafts and agriculture. The analysis of rural tourism includes its economic effects on local communities, including increasing household income, creating new jobs, improving local infrastructure and reviving traditional crafts and agriculture. The paper also discusses institutional and financial mechanisms to support the development of rural tourism, including subsidy programs, grants, incentives for youth and women, as well as the opportunities offered by the IPARD funds of the European Union. The necessity of strengthening administrative capacities, better territorial coordination and digitization is indicated as a prerequisite for further progress. The conclusions of the work point to the need to improve a strategic approach to economic policy, which would include rural tourism as a priority area within regional development. The potential of this activity is not only in the tourist offer, but also in its ability to generate positive socio-economic effects through long-term sustainability, preservation of cultural heritage and improvement of the quality of life in rural areas. The paper ends with a set of recommendations for the improvement of existing policies and measures, as well as a call for greater intersectoral cooperation between the state, local self-governments, the private sector and civil society.

Keywords: *macroeconomics, rural tourism, unemployment, regional development, economic policy.*

Field: Economy sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern conditions of global economic changes, accompanied by crises, regional inequalities and accelerated technological development, the preservation of macroeconomic stability and the discovery of new development potentials become the priorities of the economic policy of each state. In 2025, the Republic of Serbia faces the need to respond to challenges such as occasional inflationary pressures, stagnation of productivity in traditional sectors, but also population migration from smaller areas to urban centers and abroad. In this context, developing sectors that enable balanced regional development and increasing employment is one of the most important tasks of the state strategy. (Kostic & Stanistic, 2022)

One such sector that has been increasingly in the focus of public policies in the last few years is

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rural tourism - a form of tourism that takes place in rural areas and that includes the stay of tourists in villages, visits to natural sites, traditional gastronomy, activities in nature and familiarization with cultural heritage. (Borovic, Stojanovic, & Cvijanovic, 2022) In the era after the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an interest in isolated, authentic and sustainable forms of tourism, which further emphasized the importance of rural tourism in the strategic planning of the development of Serbia (Luković et al., 2022).

Although the early forms of rural tourism in Serbia existed decades ago, it has only been institutionalized and marketed in the last ten years (Tasić, 2018). This was contributed by the growing awareness of the importance of rural preservation, the availability of funds from EU funds (especially through IPARD programs), digitalization of business and promotions, as well as global trends in sustainable tourism. It is becoming especially important that rural tourism is increasingly associated with economic measures aimed at strengthening the local economy, reducing unemployment, as well as the return and stay of young people in smaller communities. At the same time, the development of rural tourism cannot be viewed in isolation - it is closely related to macroeconomic indicators and the overall economic environment. (MPSV, 2023) Stable GDP growth, low inflation, favorable conditions for investments and infrastructure development are the basic prerequisites for creating an environment in which tourism in general, and especially its rural component, can successfully develop. (OCED, 2020)

The aim of this paper is to present the current macroeconomic trends in Serbia in 2025, to connect them with the development of the rural tourism sector and to analyze the economic and institutional preconditions for its further progress. The work deals with the analysis of key indicators (GDP, inflation, unemployment, investments, exports) and in parallel monitors indicators related to rural tourism (number of overnight stays, number of households, budget allocations). The basic research thesis is that in conditions of moderate macroeconomic stability, precisely rural tourism can have multiple positive effects on local and regional development, if it is systematically supported through strategic policies and financial incentives.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research relies on a quantitative approach to the analysis of secondary data sources, with the aim of assessing the state and dynamics of the macroeconomic indicators of the Republic of Serbia in 2025, as well as establishing the role of rural tourism within the wider economic context. The methodological framework of the work includes the collection, systematization and analysis of relevant statistical and institutional sources, which enables descriptive and comparative data processing. Primary data sources include official publications of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (RSS), such as monthly bulletins, announcements and yearbooks; then the reports of the National Bank of Serbia (NBS), especially in the part related to inflation, the reference interest rate and the labor market; as well as available analyzes and forecasts of international organizations, primarily the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the European Commission.

In the part related to rural tourism, data from the Ministry of Tourism and Youth of the Republic of Serbia, annual reports on the implementation of the IPARD II program, and local strategic documents from municipalities with developed rural tourism (eg Čajetina, Knjaževac, Topola) were used. Overview data on the number of overnight stays, the number of active households, the amount of budget allocations and the number of supported users of public funds in rural areas were also collected.

The analysis was conducted through:

- descriptive statistics, in order to show the basic trends (growth or decline) of key macroeconomic indicators in the period 2021-2025;
- comparative analysis, in order to compare changes in the rural tourism sector over a five-year time frame;
- tabular and graphical presentation of data, which allows for a clearer interpretation of trends and relationships between variables;
- correlative assessments, through observing the interdependence between macroeconomic conditions and local tourism development.

In order to present the data as accurately as possible, all numerical displays have been updated by the end of April 2025, and the values are expressed in millions of dinars or euros, in accordance with the source convention. The tables and graphs were created by the author based on publicly available data, with the note that this is a processing of secondary sources, without conducting primary field research. Limitations of the methods used relate to the partial availability of data from individual municipalities, possible delays in the publication of official statistics, as well as the fact that the impact of some economic measures (e.g. investments in tourism) can only be assessed in the medium or long term.

3. RESULTS

The analysis of macroeconomic trends and the development of rural tourism in Serbia in the period 2021–2025 provides insight into the trends that shaped the economic environment on the eve of and during 2025. The focus is on three main aspects: macroeconomic indicators (GDP, inflation, unemployment), the dynamics of rural tourism development (number of overnight stays and number of households), and budget incentives for the improvement of tourism in rural areas. Below are tables summarizing key data for the specified time period, with explanations that further contextualize them.

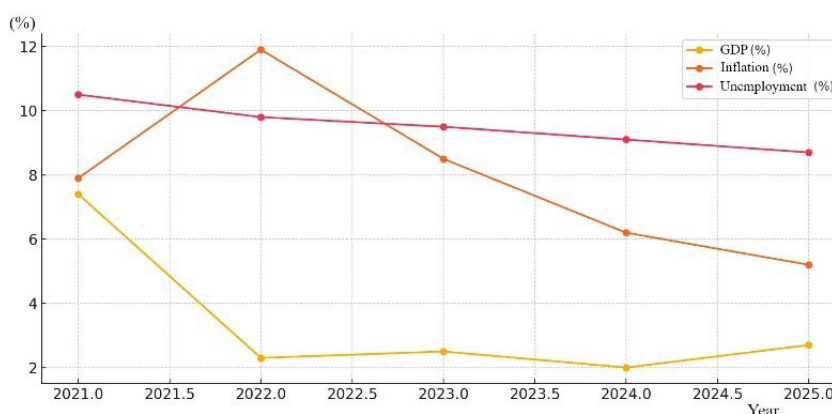
Table 1. Macroeconomic indicators of Serbia (2021–2025)

Year	GDP (%)	Inflation (%)	Unemployment (%)
2021	7.4	7.9	10.5
2022	2.3	11.9	9.8
2023	2.5	8.5	9.5
2024	2.0	6.2	9.1
2025	2.7	5.2	8.7

Source: NBS, Available at: <https://nbs.rs/en/drugi-nivo-navigacije/statistika/>

Table 1 shows the stabilization of macroeconomic indicators during the observed period. After a sharp slowdown in GDP growth after the pandemic in 2021, a gradual recovery of economic activity is observed, with moderate growth of 2.7% in 2025.

Graph 1. Macroeconomic indicators of Serbia (2021-2025)



Source: Source: Authors, based on data from the table

Inflation reached double-digit levels (11.9%) in 2022, but thanks to restrictive monetary policy measures, it is expected to decline to 5.2% by 2025. The unemployment rate is steadily declining, suggesting a recovery in the labor market and possible shifts in sectors with greater employment capacity, such as services and tourism.

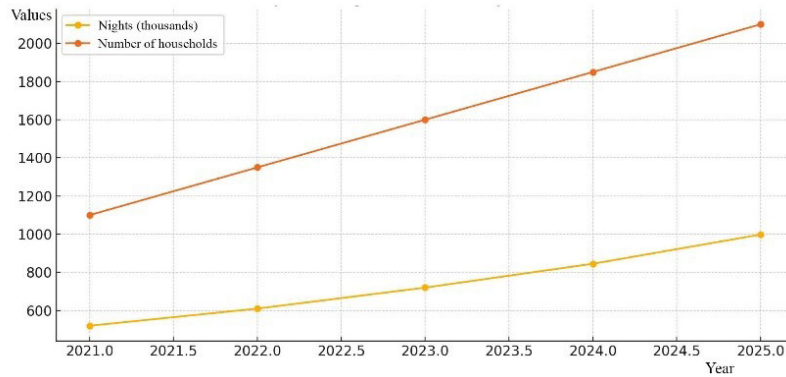
Table 2. Development of rural tourism in Serbia (2021–2025)

Year	Nights (thousands)	Number of households
2021	520	1,100
2022	610	1,350
2023	720	1,600
2024	845	1,850
2025	998	2,100

Source: RSZ, 2023

The number of overnight stays in rural areas of Serbia is constantly increasing, which indicates the growing popularity of this form of tourism. From 520 thousand overnight stays in 2021, it will reach almost a million in 2025. In parallel, the number of households offering tourist services is also growing, which confirms the trend of diversifying sources of income in rural areas.

Graph 2. Development of rural tourism in Serbia (2021-2025)



Source: Authors, based on data from the table

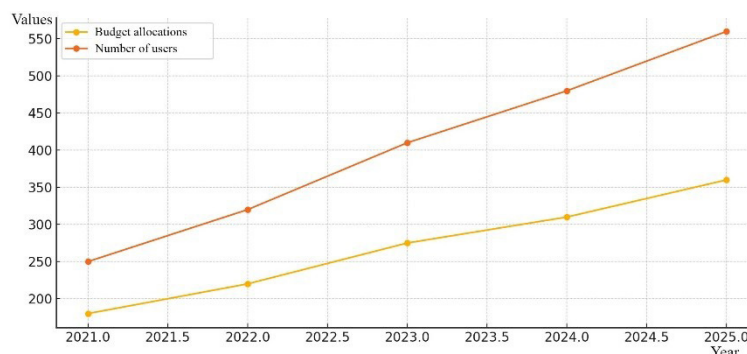
This growth can be linked to changes in tourist consumption behavior, institutional support, and better infrastructure.

Table 3. Public incentives for rural tourism (2021–2025)

Year	Budget (million RSD)	Number of households supported
2021	180	250
2022	220	320
2023	275	410
2024	310	480
2025	360	560

Source: MPSV, 2023

Graph 3. Public incentives in rural tourism (2021-2025)



Source: Authors, based on data from the table

The growth in budget allocations for rural tourism indicates the growing importance of this sector in the eyes of policymakers. From 180 million RSD in 2021, the funds have increased to 360 million in 2025, almost doubling. At the same time, the number of households receiving support is growing from 250 to 560, which implies an expansion of the availability of public funds and a more efficient implementation of development measures.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The results presented in the previous chapter shed light on key aspects of Serbia's macroeconomic development in 2025, as well as the growing importance of rural tourism as a factor of regional development and a source of income diversification in less developed areas. The discussion aims to interpret the observed trends, connect them to the broader economic framework, and point out possible implications for future policies.

First, it is evident that Serbia is seeing signs of stabilization in its macroeconomic environment. GDP growth of 2.7% in 2025, although modest, shows a positive shift compared to previous years, when external shocks (the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, inflationary pressures) significantly burdened the economy. Inflation, which peaked in 2022, is expected to decline to 5.2% by 2025, indicating the effectiveness of the restrictive monetary policy measures implemented by the National Bank of Serbia. This creates conditions for sustainable growth and greater predictability for investors and consumers.

In terms of the labor market, the unemployment rate is declining, from 10.5% in 2021 to 8.7% in 2025. This indicates a slight but steady trend of employment recovery. The contribution of the service sector and tourism to this recovery is particularly significant, further enhanced by public support programs for rural areas.

Another important aspect of the discussion concerns the development of rural tourism, which is being affirmed in Serbia as a sustainable and inclusive branch of the economy. The growth in the number of overnight stays (from 520,000 to almost a million), as well as the increase in the number of households involved in the tourism offer, indicate a two-way dynamic: on the one hand, the demand for authentic and sustainable tourism experiences is growing, while on the other hand, more and more households recognize tourism as an additional or primary source of income.

In addition to economic benefits, rural tourism also has broader social effects. It encourages the revitalization of villages, the preservation of local traditions, crafts, and cultural identity. (Dimitrijevic, Ristic, & Boskovic, 2022) It also contributes to the improvement of infrastructure – roads, water supply, internet – which positively affects the quality of life of the local population. Empowering women, youth and marginalized groups through subsidy and support programs further contributes to social cohesion and a more equitable distribution of development benefits. An important finding is that public incentives have played a key role in dynamizing the sector. Budget allocations for rural tourism have doubled over five years, and the number of beneficiaries has increased significantly. However, challenges remain, such as uneven territorial distribution of funds, administrative barriers to competition, and a lack of professional training for service providers.

Finally, it should be noted that although certain progress has been made, the long-term development of rural tourism requires better strategic planning, cross-sectoral coordination (tourism, agriculture, infrastructure, education) and greater reliance on digital tools (eTourism, digital promotion, online reservations).

5. CONCLUSION

Rural tourism in Serbia in 2025 shows significant development potential that exceeds its current economic performance. Based on the analysis of macroeconomic trends and data on the growth of rural tourism, it can be concluded that this activity has the capacity to become one of the key axes of sustainable and inclusive development of the Serbian economy, especially in the context of regional balancing and revitalization of demographically deserted areas.

The stabilization of basic macroeconomic indicators in 2025 – such as moderate GDP growth, reduced inflation and falling unemployment – opens up space for more active implementation of development policies that do not focus exclusively on large industrial centers, but equally encompass rural areas. In this sense, rural tourism stands out as a sector that combines economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.

Positive trends – an increase in the number of overnight stays, an increase in the number of active tourist households, an increase in budget allocations, and the interest of foreign and domestic investors – clearly indicate that rural tourism is no longer a marginal activity, but an area with serious development potential. Its importance is multiple: in addition to directly contributing to GDP and employment, it indirectly affects the improvement of local infrastructure, the empowerment of local communities, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the encouragement of environmentally responsible behavior. However, the further development of rural tourism requires a clear and coordinated strategy at the national level. Stronger institutional support is needed, not only through subsidies and grants, but also through the de-

velopment of educational programs, modern digital promotion platforms, and tools for managing the tourism offer. Special attention should be paid to improving the accessibility of infrastructure (roads, internet, signage), standardizing services, and connecting rural households to the wider tourism network. It is also recommended to establish a national digital platform for the promotion of rural destinations, which would provide better visibility of the offer and facilitate market access for smaller service providers. In addition, it is crucial to improve the administrative capacity of local governments so that they can more effectively implement development policies and respond to the needs of the population. In conclusion, given macroeconomic stability in 2025, there is a real basis for the systemic integration of rural tourism into broader national development strategies. Its recognition as a priority sector can contribute to economic diversification, reducing regional inequalities and creating a long-term sustainable growth model that focuses on people, communities and local resources.

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