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HOUSING
INEQUALITIES



Case study report: Sogndal

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1 Introduction

1.1 City/Town profile, challenges around just (housing and ecological) transition

Sogndal is a municipality in Vestland county, in the **Western part of Norway (Fig 1)**. The municipality was created when the former municipality of Sogndal was merged with the municipalities of Leikanger and Balestrand in 2020 (Thorsnæs and Askheim, 2025). The current municipality has a total area of about 1 258 km² and the landscape is characterized by tall mountains and narrow fjords.

Fig 1. Location of case study city: Sogndal. Made by author



This report focuses on the urban area of **Sogndalsfjøra**, which is the largest settlement within the municipality. Sogndalsfjøra is commonly referred to simply as *Sogndal* and will be referred to as such throughout this report. When the municipality as a whole is meant, this will be specified explicitly.

The urban area of Sogndal is bordered by the fjord to the east and steep mountain slopes to the north and south. The local climate is particularly well suited for fruit cultivation, including apples. Mild winters, a long growing season, and high levels of summer sunlight create favourable conditions for fruit farming. These environmental characteristics have contributed to the development of one of Sogndal's best-known local industries: jam and juice production at the Lerum factory. Fruit cultivation has historically been central to Sogndal's agricultural tradition and remains an important part of its local identity, even though many former orchards have gradually been replaced by new development. Nevertheless, Sogndal continues to be

associated with its nickname “*the juice village*” (*Saftbygda*).

As of 2025, Sogndal had a population of 12496 inhabitants (Statistics Norway, 2025). The urban area has experienced population growth since the 1970s, but the pace increased substantially in the 2000s, reaching approximately a growth of 2% per year—a higher growth rate than Oslo during the same period (Statistics Norway, 2025). This rapid growth in population meant that Sogndal quickly had to adapt to more inhabitants, and in the last two decades **densification** has been the main development approach. Between 2000 and 2020, population density in Sogndal increased by 65%, in contrast to a decrease of around 40% in the nearby municipality of Kaupanger (Næss and Moberg, 2021) . Population growth is expected to continue, with municipal projections estimating an increase of around 100 people per year, reaching more than 13,359 inhabitants by 2036 (Statistics Norway, 2026).

Much of this growth is associated with young, highly educated in-migrants moving to Sogndal as a regional centre, attracted by employment opportunities for skilled workers and access to outdoor recreation (SO1). Growth has also been driven by net in-migration more broadly, particularly among labour migrants, students, and refugees. As of 2025, 21,4% of the population in Stavanger has an immigrant background, representing an increase, representing an increase of 7,5 percentage points since 2010 (Municipality of Stavanger, 2025).

Average household size is 2.35 persons, suggesting that population growth will create a need for more than 1,000 additional housing units before 2040 (Kaur et al., 2017).

One key driver of population growth in Sogndal has been the presence of higher education institutions. Sogn og Fjordane University College (Høgskulen i Sogn og Fjordane) was established in 1994 and, following a regional restructuring in 2017, was merged into the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (Høgskulen på Vestlandet). Today, one of the university’s five campuses is located in Sogndal. The campus contributes up to 3,000 students to the local population, and approximately one quarter of these students reside in publicly supported student housing (Norsk studentorganisasjon, 2024). As discussed later in the report, student numbers have declined since the COVID-19 pandemic, a development that has likely reduced pressure on the local housing market.

The relatively high concentration of students in such a small municipality has also contributed to a significantly higher share of renters compared to national levels. In 2015, 42.8% of households in Sogndal were renting, compared to 22.6% nationally. This share has since declined substantially—particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic—to 33.9% in 2024 (Statistics Norway).

The cost of housing has been steadily rising the last couple years, with the price per square meter for detached houses going from 22 000 NOK (about 1900 Euros) in 2020 to almost 30 000 NOK (about 2590 Euros) in 2024 (Kommuneprofilen, 2025). That is a percentage increase of about 36%, much higher than the national average increase of 15%. By 2024, the average price per square metre in Sogndal was only around 1,000 NOK (about 90 euros) lower than the national average, which is notable for a relatively rural municipality.

Most of the **housing challenges** that Sogndal is facing are connected to the increase in population, which the municipality has been working on to facilitate and adapt to. As the population grows, housing demand tends to increase, while supply does not always expand at

the same pace, which can contribute to upward pressure on property prices and rental costs. Within the context of green transition initiatives, the challenge becomes even more complex. This creates barriers for different demographics seeking to settle in the area, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds, including refugees (SO1).

Furthermore, as a recently merged municipality, Sogndal has experienced political and administrative tensions regarding development priorities. There appears to be limited coordination of social housing work across municipal departments, with responsibilities fragmented between units (SO1) and the transition and consolidation of strategies from the former municipalities is also ongoing (SO1).

Finally, Sogndal's geographical context creates additional constraints. Situated between fjord and mountains, the urban area has limited land available for development, and new construction must also account for environmental protection and landscape preservation. Land availability is further constrained by stricter national policy on soil conservation introduced in recent years (Norwegian Government, 2025).

1.2 Green Transition Interventions in Sogndal: general densification strategy and the redevelopment of Lerum Brygge

The case of Sogndal is particularly interesting as it represents a small, rural municipality with strong urban development ambitions, especially in relation to densification (Fig 2). This report primarily explores what the overall **densification strategy** has meant for the town, focusing on its impacts on housing and environmental quality, as well as the contestation surrounding these developments. As mentioned above, densification has been pursued in Sogndal for several years and has been driven both by population growth and by the town's geographical constraints. Informants generally portrayed densification as a positive process that has enabled the town to grow, become more attractive, and improve accessibility. At the same time, it has triggered debates and opposition, mainly linked to the loss of agricultural land, rising housing prices and perceived declines in quality of life, particularly related to the loss of views.

Fig 2. Typical soft densification with terraced houses in Sogndal. Picture: Rebecca Cavicchia



Within the local densification agenda, the redevelopment of **Lerum Brygge** stands out as a key project (Fig 3). Lerum Brygge is a transformation project in which a former industrial site was redeveloped into a residential area consisting of **115 apartments**, commercial spaces, a small boat dock, and a parking garage, **organised as a housing sameie (a jointly owned condominium association where each apartment owner holds a private unit and a shared ownership stake in common areas)** (Veidekke, n.d.). The site was previously occupied by the Lerum factory, where jam production took place for almost one hundred years, following the establishment of production at this location in 1920 (Skjerdal and Brugrand, 2016). In 2018, Lerum relocated its main factory to the nearby municipality of Kaupanger, thereby freeing up the industrial plot for redevelopment.

Fig3. Lerum Brygge. Picture: Rebecca Cavicchia



The property was acquired in 2018 by the real estate developer Nordr and the contractor Veidekke, who initiated the development process in 2020. In an interview with the national broadcaster NRK, Veidekke's regional manager expressed the ambition that Lerum Brygge would “*put Sogndal on the map*” and described the project as a local equivalent to the Barcode , a landmark high-rise waterfront development in Oslo (Skjerdal and Brugrand, 2016). A central component of the development consists of three apartment blocks, with construction beginning in August 2020. The buildings are **six, seven, and eight storeys high**, and their height gradually decreases towards the town centre, moving away from the river outlet. Apartment sizes range from **35 to 118 m²** (Brekkehus, 2024).

The project has received attention due to its pricing structure and its position in the local housing market. The largest unit, measuring 118 m² and including a parking space, was sold for **10.15 million NOK** (approximately 870,000 EUR), reportedly breaking the informal record for the most expensive apartment sale in Sogndal (Widing, 2020). The average square meter price in the project is 73.000 NOK (~6500 euros) , almost 20 000 NOK (~1800 euros) more than the municipal average in Sogndal (KommuneProfilen, 2024).

Lerum Brygge has been developed within an area designated in the municipal master plan as suitable for **dense development, renewal, and densification within already developed**

areas (Asplan Viak, 2018). The plan allows for the construction of relatively tall buildings, in some cases up to ten storeys. At the time of its introduction, the master plan was criticised by local architects and landscape architects for “*prioritising the principle of densification above anything else*” (Storvik, 2014). The Lerum Brygge project itself also faced critique for the potential long-term impact of high-rise housing on Sogndal’s visual identity. Critics argued that the height and scale of the apartment blocks would permanently alter the town’s landscape and character.

The development was completed in 2024 and handed over by the contractor to Lerum Brygge AS. The ownership structure of Lerum Brygge AS includes Nordr as well as other investors, including local banks and private individuals.

Table 1. Key data on case study area of Sogndal

	Densification strategy in the city	Lerum Brygge
Neighborhood characteristics (general social type, economic activities, density, etc.)	Rural town and regional centre with sustained population growth; economy linked to higher education, research, services, tourism, and outdoor recreation; historically low-density housing with increasing central densification.	Redeveloped central waterfront densification area. Previously an industrial site (Lerum factory). Likely oriented toward higher-income households (high price per m ² compared to municipal average).
Duration	Long-term strategy emerging from the late 2000s	Planning and redevelopment began after property acquisition (2018–present). Key element completed: main development completed/handed over in 2024.
Funding	Predominantly market-driven private investment	Primarily private investment. Property acquired by Nordr (developer) + Veidekke (contractor) (2018). Ownership company Lerum Brygge AS partly owned by Nordr and other investors including local banks and private individuals.
Actor constellation	Municipality; private developers; landowners; investors	Nordr (developer); Veidekke (contractor); Lerum (former industrial landowner/tenant, relocated 2018); Lerum Brygge AS (ownership entity); municipality (planning authority/masterplan framework); local banks and private investors.
Aims and objectives	Accommodate population growth; strengthen regional role; reduce land take; connect campus and centre; provide housing; maintain attractiveness and access to nature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Densification of brownfield - Provide new housing supply - Contribute to urban growth in Sogndal and function as a symbolic flagship development
Specific physical measures	Soft and hard densification with terraced housing and multi-storey apartment buildings; redevelopment of former industrial sites	Conversion of industrial site to mixed-use area including: 115 apartments; commercial area; small boat dock/marina; parking garage; three apartment blocks (6, 7, 8 storeys); waterfront redevelopment (including pedestrian pathway).
Accompanying housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No specific housing measures linked to densification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No affordability measures in the sale of apartments.

policy/regulatory measures		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Airbnb/short-term rental cap: maximum 90 days per year per unit.
Key social tensions or/and benefits between greening and housing	<p>Tensions: affordability, rising prices, land loss. Benefits: improved public space, housing supply, attractiveness</p>	<p>Tensions: high-end pricing; critique of insufficient inclusive/public elements; concerns over permanent change to landscape/identity through high-rise blocks. Potential benefits: redevelopment of waterfront and improved accessibility/connectivity through a pedestrian path</p>

2 Methods

The qualitative material for this study is based primarily on semi-structured interviews conducted between June and October 2025. In total, seven interviews were carried out, with an average duration of approximately 1.5 hours. The interviewees represented a range of perspectives relevant to local development and densification processes and included an expert and former municipal employee, a researcher, a member of the university student community, a member of the parent committee of a local school, a representative of the senior citizens' council, and a board member of a local environmental organization. A full list of interviewees and their profiles is provided in Appendix 2.

The sampling strategy combined purposive and snowball approaches. The process began with an initial contact with a former planner from the Municipality of Sogndal, who facilitated access to additional interviewees through snowballing. In parallel, relevant actors were identified and contacted directly based on publicly available information from organizational websites and local networks.

All interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, recorded using the platform's built-in recording function, and transcribed with the transcription tool available in Teams. Three interviews were conducted in English and four in Norwegian. The Norwegian-language transcripts were translated into English and linguistically cleaned using an AI-based translation tool provided by SIKT, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research, which provides national guidance on secure and ethically compliant use of digital research tools. All interview data were anonymised, assigned unique codes, and stored securely in a folder accessible only to the research team.

Interview transcripts and field notes were coded and analysed using NVivo, following a thematic qualitative analysis approach. In addition to interviews, the study draws on background research including municipal plans, legal and policy documents, reports, academic literature, grey literature, and local and national news media. A two-day fieldwork visit was also conducted, during which unstructured observations were carried out, alongside informal conversations with one interviewee and with a resident of the Lerum Brygge development.

A key limitation of the qualitative material is the absence of representatives from neighbourhood groups that actively contested densification or from local activist movements. Such actors proved difficult to recruit, reflecting the relatively weak tradition of urban activism in Norway, particularly in smaller rural municipalities.

3 Civic Perceptions of Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: Sogndal

3.1 (Civic perceptions of) precedents and implementation

Interviewees consistently situate densification in Sogndal within a longer history of spatial planning decisions, institutional development, and incremental urban change predating recent discussions of green transition. Rather than being associated with a single policy moment, **densification is described as the cumulative outcome of successive planning interventions linked to population growth and the municipality’s evolving role as a regional centre.** Civic perceptions of current development are shaped less by formal planning objectives than by accumulated experiences of how change has been implemented over time through concrete projects.

Actors with close involvement in municipal planning and research (SO1 and SO2) describe densification as having emerged gradually as a dominant approach through zoning decisions, town boundary definitions, and redevelopment of centrally located sites. **Implementation is described as closely tied to concerns about transport generation, commuting between settlements, and limits to outward expansion, rather than to explicitly articulated environmental goals.**

“It wasn’t in the name a green transition, but at least in my view most of the spatial planning is where the municipalities have the most impact on a green transition, both in terms of spatial distribution of the different functions like housing and businesses, and the transport generated from the distribution of the different activities. So we’ve had a quite forward-leaning policy on densification here in Sogndal, with a strict border of the town, and we wouldn’t take any more land outside that. Where we place housing is really important for how much transport is generated, so that has been one of the main focuses in our strategies.” *SO1- Former municipal planner*

Other interviewees from municipal, research, and civil society backgrounds (SO1, SO2, SO4–SO6) refer to densification as a process marked by contestations. Conflicts related to the conversion of agricultural land, changes to established neighbourhoods, and loss of views or landscape values are described as accompanying individual projects over time.

Within this broader history of densification, Lerum Brygge is repeatedly identified as a key reference point. A former planner situates the project within a longer sequence of central redevelopment initiatives dating back to the late 2000s, recalling that the area was previously occupied by the Lerum jam and juice factory, which for decades represented a major industrial presence along the waterfront. Following the relocation of production, the site became available for redevelopment and was gradually transformed into a residential and mixed-use area through private development under municipal planning frameworks.

Interviewees from municipal and civil society backgrounds (SO1, SO4, SO6) describe the implementation of Lerum Brygge as highly visible and temporally extended, unfolding over

several years and completed relatively recently. The project is frequently referenced as a concrete illustration of how densification has been carried out in practice, producing a clear physical “before and after” in the townscape. **The redevelopment is associated with new apartment buildings, public paths along the waterfront (Fig 4), and recreational spaces that changed the relationship between the town centre and the fjord.**

Fig. 4. Pathway along the fjord that reconnects the town with the waterfront. Lerum Brygge can also be observed. Picture: Rebecca Cavicchia



On the other hand, civil society actors (SO4–SO6) commonly describe the project as market-driven, with limited emphasis on affordability or social mix, even as it improved public access to previously industrial land.

“People come in and see, for example, Lerum Brygge and think, ‘Those are nice, fancy new apartments I can’t afford,’ and then don’t really think about it much, because they didn’t see what it looked like before—just what it looks like now.” SO6- *Representative of green organization*

Overall, civic perceptions of densification and Lerum Brygge are shaped by the tension between long-term experience of incremental change and the visibility of recent flagship projects. For actors involved in planning and local governance, these developments represent the continuation of established strategies implemented through successive projects. For civil society and student actors, they are primarily encountered through their material outcomes and their implications for everyday use of the town.

3.2 (Civic perceptions of) participation and governance (procedural)

Interviewees describe participation and governance around densification in Sogndal as **embedded in ordinary municipal planning processes** rather than organised through a single, dedicated participatory framework. Participation is primarily associated with the preparation of overarching municipal plans, zoning processes, and sectoral strategies, where **consultation and information-sharing are described as standard components of implementation.**

From the perspective of a former municipal employee (SO1), participation is closely linked to the development of community plans and long-term strategies. **Interviewees refer to public meetings, consultations, and the collection of contributions from local communities and children as forming part of the basis for political priorities and development goals.** These processes are described as shaping how planning objectives are articulated and communicated, even if decisions are ultimately taken within formal political and administrative structures:

“So we had quite a bit of what’s that called—contributions, yeah. From both kids and the local community. So this is really the basis of the new municipality, on politics and development plans and what we want the municipality to be really.” SO1- *Former municipal planner*

Participation is also described as supported by communicative tools and institutional arrangements aimed at making planning processes visible. The community plan is referred to as being presented through a dedicated digital platform, where goals, strategies, and focus areas are made publicly accessible. Within this context, participation is framed as part of a broader effort to build social acceptance around political decisions, including climate-related strategies.

At the same time, interviewees describe participation as varying in scope and depth across projects. Civil society actors (SO5) refer to public meetings and information-sharing as common practices through which local communities are involved, while also pointing to poor economic capacity as a limiting factor shaping how participation is carried out, often reducing it to basic information-sharing and one-off public meetings rather than more sustained or resource-intensive forms of engagement.:

“The local actors I’ve been involved with have been good at involving the local community through public meetings and information about various projects. The will is not lacking, but the economic capacity is the challenge.” SO5- *Member of senior citizens council*

Power dynamics are described most explicitly in relation to planning initiatives that affect land use and property interests. Interviewees refer in particular to the Campus Områdeplan, an area zoning plan adopted in 2019 that aims to densify the areas between the university campus and the town centre. The plan covers areas with a long history of agricultural use and detached housing, which interviewees point to when describing opposition and mobilisation. In this context, actors with research backgrounds (SO2) describe how local landowners and neighbouring residents can be influential or effective lobbyists:

“When the municipality or private planning initiatives are being presented, they will very often provoke local residents and those neighbors influenced by these plans and in some cases these neighbors or local residents are influential or have access to the right politicians or they are efficient lobbyists. I think that is the case in this Campus Områdeplan that some of the landowners in the surroundings are opposed to this development, and they know how to raise momentum against the plans.” *SO2-Researcher*

Finally, while **Lerum Brygge** features prominently in other accounts of development in Sogndal, it is **not referred to in the interview material as an example of participation or governance practice**. Interviewees’ accounts of participation instead consistently focus on municipal plans, school development, campus planning, and research-led initiatives. This absence suggests that Lerum Brygge is not recalled as a participatory reference point within discussions of governance.

3.3 (Civic perceptions of) (in)equity (distributional)

Interviewees discuss **issues of injustice and inequity in Sogndal primarily in relation to housing access, affordability, and the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens associated with growth and densification**. At the same time, interviewees also refer to policies and practices intended to promote more equitable outcomes, particularly in relation to housing provision for vulnerable groups. These, however, are not explicitly linked to densification.

Almost all interviewees highlight limits to the equity outcomes of densification, linking densification to rising housing prices and increasing competition for housing. Housing prices in Sogndal are described as comparable to those in larger cities like Bergen, with interviewees noting that municipal strategies to improve housing quality operate within market dynamics that also contribute to higher prices. These tensions are described as a recurring feature of local debates. New housing developments are described as expensive and largely inaccessible to less privileged groups:

“It’s not so that people living in the town centre have easy access to green spaces within their immediate surroundings. And when new housing is being built, these flats are expensive, so they will not be an alternative for less privileged people.” *SO2-Researcher*

Across interviews, **groups most frequently referred to as affected by these dynamics include students, renters, refugees, and other vulnerable households.** Interviewees describe Sogndal as having a high proportion of renters alongside a rapidly growing student population, intensifying exposure to housing market pressures. Additionally, interviewees identify equity-oriented considerations in discussions around development and densification, even if these are described as secondary. The researcher (SO2) notes that arguments concerning affordable housing and less privileged groups are present in political debates, particularly among left-wing parties, although they are not described as dominant:

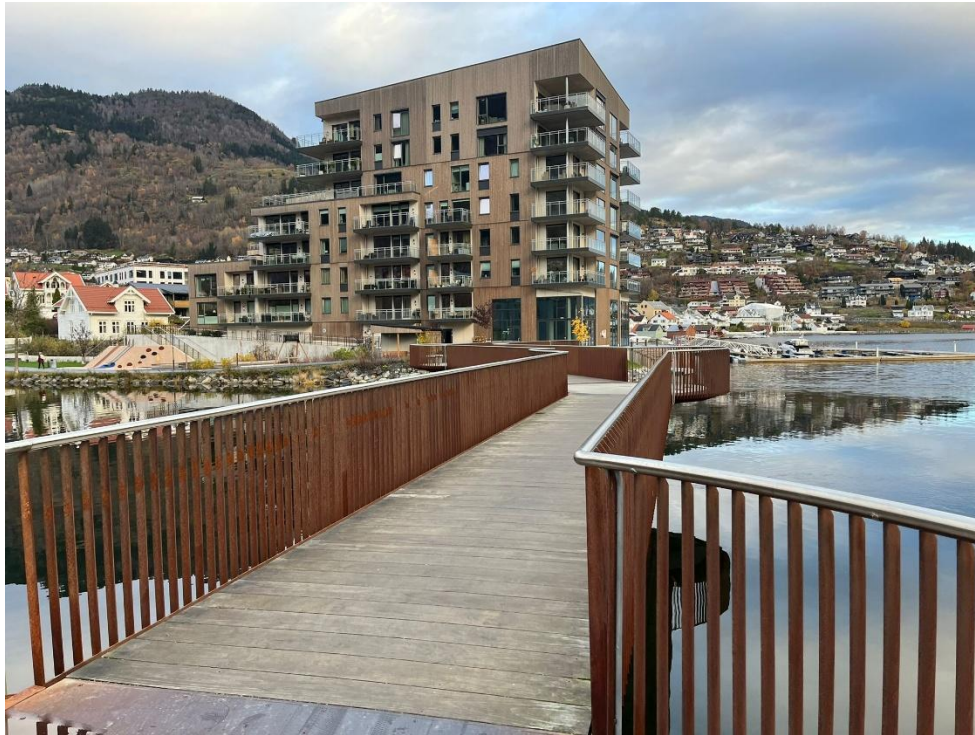
“It’s an interest conflict, and when you develop an area, some might be hurt by that. But the social engagement for those affected by the development in Sogndal or the concern for people seeking affordable housing and those less privileged in society, those debates could be heard from the left parties, but it’s not high on the political agenda.” *SO2-Researcher*

Concerning social and spatial equity aspects, from the perspective of municipal actors (SO1), housing provision for refugees and other vulnerable households is described as guided by national frameworks and economic incentives, but also by an explicit aim to avoid spatial concentration and exclusion. Even if not explicitly linked to densification strategies, interviewees refer to municipal strategies that seek to integrate housing for vulnerable groups into the ordinary housing market and locate it in areas with access to public transport and services:

“So at the national level there is every year there’s like a questionnaire for the different municipalities; how many refugees can you house? And so there’s economic incentives for giving them a house, to say it easy. And Sogndal’s policy has been to try to locate the housing for vulnerable groups both in Sogndal centre and Kaupanger and the different areas, but places where they are at least able to use public transport, bus. But it’s part of the ordinary housing market, really.” *SO1- Former municipal planner*

Concerning Lerum Brygge, interviewees and fieldwork observations highlighted two main aspects related to potential perceptions of injustice. The first relates to the **loss of views toward the fjord for residents in existing housing.** During a fieldwork walk across the town, one informant referred to strong dissatisfaction among incumbent residents when the Lerum Brygge buildings were constructed, noting that the new development obstructed previously valued fjord views (Fig 5).

Fig. 5. Access to Lerum Brygge, with pre-existing houses visible behind the new building. Picture: Rebecca Cavicchia



The same informant also remarked that the site had previously been occupied by the Lerum jam factory, suggesting that views toward the fjord were not entirely unobstructed prior to redevelopment. The second point concerns housing affordability. **Civil society actors (SO4–SO6) commonly described Lerum Brygge as a market-driven development, with limited emphasis on affordability or social mix.** While the project was acknowledged for improving public access to a formerly industrial waterfront area, interviewees did not associate it with housing options accessible to less privileged groups.

“It has a reputation as fancy apartments for older people, which is fine and important, but it’s not really in the orbit of students or student organisations in Sogndal.” SO6 - *Member of the student community*

3.4 (Civic perceptions of) political mobilization

Densification of agricultural land is repeatedly cited as a focal point for mobilization. Interviewees recall cases where strong local resistance from residents led to tangible changes in zoning decisions, including the reversal of planned development areas back to agricultural use. One interviewee refers to opposition against a zoning proposal affecting farmland on the outskirts of Sogndal, where resistance resulted in the withdrawal of development plans:

“And so the regional state was giving us the green light [in 2013] to have that strategy and take the agricultural land within the red border here [points at a map] ... And then there’s been a shift [in 2022/2023] in both national level and local level views on soil policies like

"jordvern" -soil conservation. In that like the zoning plan we were working on there were plans of like building houses. And there was quite a big resistance to it. And so. The outcome was really to take out this whole area and like taking it back to agricultural land from the main source here. Really. So. Let's see from the line over here [points at a map] this whole farming area is going back to what it is really.... That's really due to the resistance towards the densification. That's one of the clearest examples we've had." SO1 – *Former Municipal Planner*

Opposition is described as particularly strong where densification proposals affect long-established housing areas. Interviewees refer to resistance against plans to replace detached housing with multi-storey apartment buildings, noting that some landowners were unwilling to sell and that this contributed to organized opposition:

"It's single detached houses. Family houses owned by the families living here from way back.
...
All of these houses over here were zoned to building blocks on four or five stories. And so there was a quite big opposition." SO1 – *Former Municipal Planner*

The Campus Områdeplan mentioned in the previous section is repeatedly referenced as a prominent example of political mobilization. **Interviewees describe how opposition to the plan coalesced into a coordinated campaign, including a signature collection in 2018 explicitly targeting the densification proposal.** While the plan was formally adopted, its implementation is described as having been delayed:

"There was quite a big opposition to the plans and had like a signature campaign with 1300 signatures saying 'Stop Områdeplan Campus'. And that was quite a big opposition to the plans... Well, the plan is adopted, but it's not been implemented. So it shows that mobilization actually mattered in this case." SO1 – *Former Municipal Planner*

At the same time, interviewees emphasize that mobilization capacity is uneven and shaped by the interests at stake. From a research perspective (SO2), opposition to densification is frequently framed around the protection of private amenities—such as gardens or views—rather than broader concerns related to housing affordability or social equity:

"My impression is that it's more about people that are afraid of losing privileges or afraid of losing their apple gardens or their fjord view or whatever.
It's an interest conflict, and when you develop an area, some might be hurt by that." SO2 – *Researcher*

Not all land-use discussions are described as escalating into sustained mobilization. Some interviewees refer to debates around land use in the town centre as recurring but manageable, characterizing them as part of the trade-offs associated with maintaining a functional and attractive centre:

“It’s mostly about the use of land in the center. There is a price to having a well-functioning center, because then some areas have to be put to use. But this is something we can live with, and it hasn’t led to major conflicts.” *SO2 – Researcher*

Concerning Lerum Brygge, the densification project does not feature in interviewees’ accounts of political mobilization. Interviewees do not recall petitions, campaigns, or organized opposition associated with the project, and no collective action comparable to that surrounding densification of agricultural land or the Campus Områdeplan is mentioned. Accounts of political mobilization consistently focus on projects affecting farmland and low-density residential areas. Overall, mobilization is described as most visible where development directly affects land ownership, housing form, or landscape values, while other forms of development generate more limited or no collective response.

3.5 (Civic perceptions of) socio-ecological impacts/benefits (positive)

At a general level, densification is described as contributing to physical upgrading and more efficient use of centrally located land. Interviewees refer to the transformation of former industrial sites and underutilised areas into mixed-use developments with housing, services, and commercial activities. From a research perspective (SO2), **these projects are described as producing compact urban forms that provide new housing opportunities while activating ground floors with shops and services:**

“As we speak I could reckon at least three, maybe four development projects in a central Sogndal where grey areas or poorly developed quarters are being densified, and we get the new three- to four-storey buildings with housing in the upper parts and the shops at the ground level. So, all these projects will provide more flats for couples or single households.” *SO2 - Researcher*

Improved housing accessibility is frequently highlighted as a positive outcome of densification. Interviewees note that Sogndal has been able to accommodate population growth without severe housing shortages, particularly for students. From the student representative’s perspective (SO3), housing conditions for students are described as comparatively good and affordable:

“In Sogndal the average student has it very good when it comes to housing. It’s a renter’s market here, we don’t struggle with student support. Here you can live for 4,000 NOK (less than 400 euros) a month with electricity and internet included, and you’re just two minutes away from school.” *SO3 - Member of the student community*

At the same time, interviewees refer to densification as gradually increasing the supply of smaller housing units, which is seen as beneficial for singles, couples, and households with more limited housing needs. Municipal actors describe expectations that ongoing densification will contribute to a more diversified housing stock, particularly through the construction of apartments rather than detached housing. As a member of a green organization explains:

“There has been a strong tradition of detached housing here, but that is changing. With densification, we see more apartments being built, and that is important, because not everyone wants or needs a detached house with a garden. Smaller households, older

people, and young people need different housing types, and densification makes it possible to provide that.” *SO7 - Board member of environmental organization*

Civil society actors also highlight the social value of green and blue infrastructure. The establishment of Fjordstien, a continuous path along the fjord that is also connected to the Lerum Brygge area (Fig 3 and 4), is described as the result of long-term struggle and as a widely **appreciated public amenity enabling inclusive access to the waterfront**. In this context, Lerum Brygge is further described as contributing to public access and everyday use of the fjord, complementing broader efforts to open up previously industrial waterfront areas. Interviewees thus perceive the project as aligning physical densification with improvements in public space and environmental quality.

“After a lot of struggle over 10–25 years, we’ve achieved Fjordstien—a trail that runs along the fjord throughout the village. It’s very important for creating contact between the fjord and the village, and is a joy for everyone. Here you can drive a wheelchair, walk with a walker, stroll, walk the dog, walk with your partner—and it’s a great offering for all.” *SO5 - Member of senior citizens council*

While associated with various concerns related to housing accessibility and the blocking of fjord views, Lerum Brygge is also referred to as an example of a development perceived to generate positive impacts especially related to the improved quality of the built environment. Interviewees describe the project **as a successful transformation of a former industrial site into a dense residential area integrated into the town centre** (SO1, SO2).

Interviewees also emphasise the project’s design qualities and integration of green and blue infrastructure. Lerum Brygge is described as visually attractive and well-received, partly due to the use of wood materials, green roofs, and landscaped spaces around the buildings:

“The buildings have green roofs and some permeable plantings and green spaces between and around the buildings. I think it looks nice, which is important from a public outreach perspective. There’s often a lot of resistance to new apartment buildings because they’re seen as ugly and big, but Lerum Brygge, in my opinion, is attractive and fits in nicely with its surroundings. The wood paneling and the greenery on the roofs and around the buildings are important in achieving that.” *SO6 - Board member of «green organization»*

Overall, interviewees describe several positive social impacts of densification in Sogndal as emerging through improved housing provision, physical upgrading, access to amenities, and enhanced connections to nature. Lerum Brygge is highlighted as a particularly visible example where dense development, design quality, and green-blue infrastructure are perceived as contributing positively to everyday life and community acceptance.

3.6 (Civic perceptions of) socio-ecological impacts/harms (negative)

While coming with several positive outcomes, densification is repeatedly linked to rising housing prices and reduced accessibility for certain groups, in particular in the owner-occupied

sector of the housing market. Interviewees describe **Sogndal as one of the rural municipalities in Norway with the highest housing prices, noting that detached houses and new apartments alike have become increasingly expensive.** From a research perspective (SO2), housing affordability is described as a growing constraint on who can establish themselves in the municipality. Interviewees further link high housing prices to broader demographic and fiscal concerns. Rising prices are described as pushing new households to neighbouring municipalities with more building land, resulting in a loss of potential residents and taxpayers for Sogndal, and an increased need for public transport (SO2).

While densification is described as increasing housing supply, interviewees question the affordability of new apartments in central areas. Civil society actors (SO4) and researchers (SO2) note that centrally located apartments are often priced beyond what is accessible for less privileged groups:

“You can discuss how cheap apartments in the center actually are, because they’re quite expensive.” *SO4 - Member of the parent committee*

“These flats are expensive, so they will not be an alternative for less privileged people.”
SO2 - Researcher

Interviewees also describe uneven effects of densification on housing availability for certain population groups. Civil society actors (SO7) suggest that while more apartments are being built, this has not substantially eased overall housing availability, particularly for small households such as single parents. One interviewee reflects on personal experience of being priced out of new housing:

“A three-room apartment costs almost the same as a slightly older detached house. For me, when I was going to buy as a single parent with one daughter, it was almost impossible. Maybe if I sold my share of a house, I could get a two-bedroom apartment, but the new apartments are still more expensive than what’s really manageable.” *SO7 - Representative of the municipal refugee service*

Beyond housing affordability, **interviewees associate densification with broader socio-spatial change and loss of land.** Several interviewees refer to the rapid transformation of areas that were previously agricultural or characterized by orchards and detached housing. From a research and civil society perspective (SO6), this transformation is described as generating a sense of loss of Sogndal’s agricultural identity:

“There’s a feeling in Sogndal that the agricultural soul of the place is going away with urban densification. A lot of the small orchards people had in their yards are being cut down to support new housing. I think a lot of people acknowledge the need for new housing and changes in the urban fabric, but also regret the loss of the connection to historical economic drivers.” *SO6 - Board member of environmental organization*

Within this broader context, Lerum Brygge is referred to as a visible example through which some of these negative social impacts are perceived. While interviewees do not describe organized opposition to the project, they refer to **dissatisfaction among nearby residents related to construction impacts and changes to the built environment. In particular, the obstruction of fjord views is mentioned as a source of frustration.**

Interviewees also describe Lerum Brygge as symbolizing broader affordability concerns. From the perspective of renters and students (SO6), the project is perceived as visually attractive but financially inaccessible, particularly for newcomers.

“People come in and see, for example, Lerum Brygge and think, ‘Those are nice, fancy new apartments I can’t afford,’ Of course, it’s a different story for people who grew up here or have lived here a long time.” *SO6 - Board member of environmental organization*

3.7 (Civic perceptions of) tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors

At a general level, municipal institutions are described as occupying a central coordinating role, while operating under constraints related to limited resources, national regulations, and long planning timeframes. From the perspective of a former municipal employee (SO1), densification has been pursued as a long-term strategy, with the municipality sometimes acting directly as a landowner and developer in order to make densification feasible:

“But in the long-term strategy there was a densification. Like the houses would be teared down and built up on a more dense scale like building blocks. And a lot of the areas that have been regulated for densification, the municipality would buy some of the houses and act really as a real estate developer. On a strategic level, related to making the densification work really.” *SO1 – Former Municipal Planner*

Private sector actors are repeatedly described as influential, particularly in relation to housing development and growth linked to the expansion of the university campus. Interviewees emphasise that students have been a key driver of population growth in Sogndal, contributing to sustained demand pressure on the local housing market. In this context, strong interest from real-estate developers in densification is reported, alongside the dominance of private provision in sectors such as student housing (SO1).

Civil society organisations and community groups are described as having more limited formal power, but maintaining influence through dialogue, cooperation, and participation in public meetings. Representatives from civil society (SO5) emphasise communication and negotiation rather than confrontation:

“The challenges have sometimes slowed things down, but we have good cooperation with the business sector. We also have good communication with developers, owners and the various projects through public meetings and town halls, so we find that they listen.” *SO5 - Member of senior citizens council*

Within this broader stakeholder landscape, **Lerum Brygge is not described as a site of active negotiation or contestation among multiple civic actors**. Interviewees do not refer to dedicated stakeholder forums, civic coalitions, or sustained dialogue processes linked specifically to the project. Instead, Lerum Brygge appears indirectly in accounts of private sector-led development, market-driven housing provision, and broader discussions of developer influence in Sogndal.

3.8 (Civic perceptions of) innovative governance mechanisms

Interviewees describe tools and innovation related to green transition and urban development in Sogndal as **fragmented and largely incremental**, rather than transformative or system-changing. While a range of planning instruments, research projects, and strategic frameworks are referred to, these are not described as forming a coherent toolbox with strong regulatory or redistributive capacity. Instead, innovation is portrayed as occurring primarily through **pilot projects, and knowledge production**, with limited ability to shape market-driven development outcomes.

One municipal actor (SO1) describes the preparation of a joint climate and development scenario between Sogndal and the neighbouring municipality of Luster, referred to as the **BAKT strategy**, which stands for *bustad* (housing), *arbeid* (employment), *klima* (climate), and *transport*. In interviewees' accounts, BAKT is described as a long-term, scenario-based framework aimed at aligning housing development, labour markets, mobility, and climate objectives across municipalities, rather than as a legally binding planning instrument. BAKT does not represent an instrument capable of enforcing specific development trajectories or constraining private actors. As such, its influence is described as indirect and dependent on how it is taken up in subsequent statutory plans.

In contrast, interviewees consistently point to **weak innovation capacity** in areas such as building retrofit, energy efficiency, and housing affordability. Economic constraints, high upfront costs, and reliance on national funding schemes are described as limiting the municipality's ability to deploy more ambitious tools.

"Not in terms of retrofitting, like energy retrofitting, that has not been the goal. The main goal is really just acceptable housing standards. Retrofitting to a high level of energy efficiency or a low level of energy consumption is not economically viable, really just because the investments are so big." *SO1- Former Municipal Planner*

Existing instruments for housing vulnerable groups are described as long-standing and reactive rather than innovative, focused on meeting minimum standards rather than advancing broader social or environmental objectives.

Lerum Brygge does not feature prominently in interviewees' accounts of tools or innovation, and it is not described as a testing ground for new planning instruments or experimental governance arrangements. However, fieldwork observations point to the presence of

regulatory tools operating at the level of the housing cooperative (*sameie* – see Appendix 6.1 for a definition). During a conversation with a local resident, it was noted that the cooperative has adopted internal regulations limiting short-term rentals, restricting the use of platforms such as Airbnb to a maximum of 90 days per year. At the same time, it should be noted that renting out apartment in this residential complex is remarkably profitable. An informal check of advertised prices during fieldwork indicated that a two-bedroom apartment at Lerum Brygge was listed at approximately 500 euros per night, illustrating the high market value of short-term accommodation despite the existence of such restrictions.

3.9 (Civic perceptions of) tourism and market pressures

Interviewees consistently frame tourism and market pressures in Sogndal as emerging from longer-term growth dynamics rather than from short-term tourism alone. These pressures are described as closely linked to sustained population growth, densification strategies, and the municipality’s positioning as a regional centre for higher education and outdoor activities. Tourism, in this sense, is understood as one component of a broader mobility and attractiveness dynamic that also includes students and new permanent residents.

At a general level, interviewees emphasise that **Sogndal’s housing market has been shaped by unusually rapid population growth for a rural municipality**. Growth rates since the 2000s are described as having exerted strong upward pressure on housing prices, resulting in price levels comparable to larger Norwegian cities:

“Sogndal has had a quite rapid growth all the way from the 70s, but when I started here as a student in 2007 and until about 2019, we had between 1.5 and 2% annual growth. So it was really like it was growing more rapidly than Oslo and that’s been the main driving factor of the housing market in Sogndal. And that has had a big effect on the housing prices. So a house here in Sogndal has about the same price as a house in Bergen, which is quite the opposite of other rural areas in Norway.” *SO1 – Former Municipal Planner*

Municipal actors similarly describe housing prices as exceptionally high relative to Sogndal’s size, linking this to limited availability of land for detached housing near the centre and increasing reliance on densification:

“I actually think the price level can be compared to Bergen, which is a bit unusual. Sogndal is one of the few municipalities that has still had positive population growth, and this has led to rising prices because more people are moving in. As for detached houses, there’s very little space to build new ones near the center.” *SO7 - Representative of the municipal refugee service*

Interviewees consistently link these dynamics to Sogndal's **place branding as a destination for outdoor recreation**. A former municipal employee (SO1) describes how, since the mid-2000s, the municipality has cultivated an image as a centre for skiing, biking, and outdoor lifestyles, attracting both tourists and longer-term residents. This understanding is echoed by other interviewees, who emphasise that nature and the student environment are central to Sogndal's attractiveness. At the same time, interviewees describe growing awareness among planners and politicians that the municipality's natural assets must be actively managed to sustain attractiveness for both visitors and residents:

"There is a growing understanding among most people and politicians and planners alike that we need to keep the attractivity, but to also develop these natural assets to make this society even more attractive for tourists and new settlers." SO2 - *Researcher*

Concerning **Lerum Brygge**, interviewees account primarily as **a symbol of high-end, market-oriented development rather than as a focal point of tourism-related debate**. Nevertheless, a few apartments from the residential complex are listed in short term rental platforms at remarkably high prices, showing speculative dynamics.

Overall, interviewees describe tourism and market pressures in Sogndal as the outcome of sustained growth, place branding, and investment linked to the municipality's role as a regional hub and outdoor destination. While densification is framed as a necessary response to these pressures, rising housing prices and developments such as Lerum Brygge contribute to perceptions of market intensity that interviewees describe as unusual for a municipality of Sogndal's size.

3.10 Gaps in Perceptions Between Civic Groups and Public Agencies

Interview material does not point to systematic or openly articulated conflict between civic groups and public agencies in Sogndal. Instead, interviewees describe a planning and development context characterized by **broad alignment on overall objectives**, alongside differences in emphasis and expectations that emerge implicitly rather than through direct confrontation. Where perceptual differences appear, they are expressed through contrasting ways of describing constraints, priorities, and the pace of change, rather than through explicit disagreement.

Municipal actors consistently frame development challenges—particularly those related to densification, housing provision, and environmental ambitions—through the lens of **structural and institutional constraints**. Limited economic capacity, regulatory frameworks, and long planning horizons are repeatedly emphasized as shaping what is feasible in practice. From this perspective, success is often articulated in terms of having established plans, secured growth, and avoided stagnation:

“There’s not much economic *handlingsrom* (room for maneuver). Sogndal kommune is quite a poor municipality, like many smaller communities in Norway. And especially when we were growing into a bigger municipality, you’d have to distribute limited resources.” *SO1 – Former Municipal Planner*

Civic actors and researchers largely acknowledge these constraints, and interview material does not suggest a strong rejection of municipal rationales. At the same time, their accounts place greater emphasis on **experienced outcomes**, particularly in relation to housing affordability and accessibility. Rather than challenging planning strategies such as, interviewees question how these strategies translate into everyday housing options.

These statements do not directly contest municipal intentions, but reflect a different evaluative focus: where public agencies emphasize provision and growth, civic actors emphasize **who is actually able to benefit**.

In the case of **Lerum Brygge**, interview material does not reveal a pronounced perceptual divide between civic actors and public agencies. The project is largely discussed as having proceeded within established planning frameworks, with limited reference to participation, contestation, or negotiation. Civic concerns related to affordability or exclusion are expressed, but not framed as a critique of public agencies’ role or decisions, suggesting a degree of normalization of market-led development outcomes.

Overall, interviewees’ accounts suggest that **differences in perception between civic groups and public agencies in Sogndal are subtle and situational rather than polarized**. Divergences appear primarily in how success is assessed—through institutional feasibility on the one hand and lived accessibility on the other—rather than in fundamental disagreement over development objectives.

4 Critical Analysis: Sogndal

Sogndal represents a distinctive case of **rural growth** in Norway, where sustained population increase has been closely coupled with densification strategies, generating specific implications for housing inequalities and land loss, alongside more ambivalent and, in some cases, positive outcomes.

As discussed in previous sections, densification constitutes the main vehicle through which environmental objectives, growth management, and housing provision are pursued in Sogndal, and it is therefore the principal lens through which housing inequalities are assessed in this report.

Within this framework, densification, selective redevelopment, and compact growth cannot be understood as isolated environmental interventions. Rather, they are embedded in a broader local political economy shaped by sustained population growth, a strong higher-education sector that attracts many students, limited municipal financial capacity, and reliance on market-based housing provision. Across interviews, densification is generally described as necessary to accommodate growth within a limited supply of developable land, and compact development

is not articulated as a fundamentally contested goal. Furthermore, interviewees acknowledge certain positive effects of densification, particularly in relation to housing provision and the conversion of former industrial land into publicly accessible areas with improved connectivity and access to the fjord.

On the other hand, densification is perceived as interacting ambivalently with housing inequalities rather than resolving them.

Importantly, civic actors rarely frame densification as a “climate” or “green” project in itself. Instead, it is understood primarily through its **housing, land-use, and social consequences**, with environmental rationales often appearing as supporting arguments rather than as the core motivation. In this respect, densification functions as a planning strategy with environmental justifications, rather than as an environmental intervention per se.

From a distributional perspective, while intended to accommodate growth and limit land take, densification has largely materialized through centrally located, market-oriented apartment developments. This has given rise to the first and most persistent point of friction: **affordability**. Interviewees consistently describe new housing produced through densification as expensive and inaccessible to less privileged groups. In this sense, densification increases supply without significantly expanding access, reinforcing a housing system in which market participation remains the primary entry point.

A second point of friction relates to **housing quality and loss of view**, particularly where increased building heights and density alter established residential environments. Complaints about blocked fjord views, reduced daylight, are mentioned in interview material, especially in relation to prominent densification-linked redevelopment projects such as Lerum Brygge. While these concerns rarely translate into organized political mobilization, they contribute to everyday dissatisfaction and shape perceptions of densification as involving qualitative trade-offs for existing residents.

The third—and most politically salient—point of friction concerns **loss of land and the erosion of Sogndal’s agricultural character**. Contestations surrounding the Campus Områdeplan illustrate that densification becomes particularly contentious when it entails the conversion of agricultural land or long-established low-density areas. Unlike affordability or view-related concerns, which are typically experienced individually, land loss has generated collective mobilization. This indicates that densification is most strongly resisted when it is perceived to threaten Sogndal’s historical identity and relationship to land, rather than solely its housing market.

These dynamics are further shaped by Sogndal’s **large student population and the structure of its rental market**. The prevalence of students explains the municipality’s relatively high share of renters compared to the national average and has historically sustained a flexible, predominantly privately supplied rental sector. While this configuration has facilitated the absorption of population growth, it has also entrenched **reliance on market mechanisms and heightened exposure to demand fluctuations**—an issue that became particularly visible when student numbers declined in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Densification introduces additional housing supply into this system but does not**

fundamentally alter its underlying market dependence. As a result, Sogndal has been able to accommodate growth without experiencing acute housing shortages, yet this has come at the cost of normalising private provision and market responsiveness as the primary modes of housing governance, rather than strengthening public housing policy.

Market and tourism pressures operate as reinforcing rather than primary stressors. Sogndal's branding as an outdoor destination enhances overall attractiveness, while developments such as Lerum Brygge illustrate how densification combined with environmental upgrading can generate high-value housing with limited accessibility. Short-term rental activity, though regulated, signals the potential for speculative dynamics to coexist with residential use.

5 Concluding reflections

Taken together, the Sogndal case illustrates how housing inequalities related to green transition unfold through **layered, locally specific frictions** rather than singular causal mechanisms. Densification functions as the primary interface where environmental objectives, housing markets, and local identity collide.

The three points of friction—affordability, housing quality and loss of view, and loss of land—are not equally politicized. While affordability and housing quality are experienced individually and discussed pragmatically, loss of agricultural land and low-density character touches deeper historical and symbolic registers, explaining why it has generated the most visible contestation.

The student population plays an ambivalent role in this landscape. It has sustained a flexible rental market and enabled growth, but has also entrenched a housing system highly sensitive to demand fluctuations and weak in redistributive capacity. Densification adds new supply to this system without fundamentally altering its dependence on private actors.

Tourism and market pressures act as amplifiers rather than primary drivers. While tourism has not yet produced large-scale displacement, the symbolic and economic value attached to nature, waterfronts, and design quality feeds into broader price dynamics. Environmental improvements thus risk reinforcing inequality unless paired with stronger housing regulation.

Overall, Sogndal demonstrates how green transition initiatives can coexist with rising housing inequality without triggering overt crisis. This “quiet” trajectory underscores the importance of addressing housing justice proactively in smaller, growing towns, where cumulative market effects and land-use decisions may otherwise reshape access and belonging over time.

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7 Appendix 1 – Glossary

7.1 Terms and concepts

Framtiden i våre hender: “The Future in Our Hands” is a Norwegian environmental and solidarity NGO founded in 1974.

Sameie: a form of joint ownership where individuals own their apartments outright while sharing ownership of common areas and facilities.

8 Appendix 2 – Key interview data and transcripts

#	Position of Interviewee	Sector/company	Date of interview	Media
SO1	Expert/former employee	Municipality of Sogndal	6/24/2025	Teams
SO2	Researcher	Vestlandsforskning	8/27/2025	Teams
SO3	Member of the student community	Studentsamfunnet Sogndal	9/23/2025	Teams
SO4	Member of the parent committee	Kvåle school	10/9/2025	Teams
SO5	Member of senior citizens council	Sogndal Eldrerådet	10/13/2025	Teams
SO6	Board member of environmental organization	Framtiden i våre hender Sogndal	9/29/2025	Teams
SO7	Representative of the municipal refugee service	Municipality of Sogndal	10/29/2025	Teams