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Playground equipment accessible for all children

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National foreword

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TECHNICAL REPORT

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Playground equipment accessible for all children

Équipements d'aires de jeux accessibles à tous les enfants

Barrierefreie Kinderspielplatzgeräte

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Foreword

This document (CEN/TR 16467:2013) has been prepared by Technical Committee CEN/TC 136 “Sports, playground and other recreational facilities and equipment”, the secretariat of which is held by DIN.

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0 Introduction

0.1 General

CEN/TC 136/SC 1 decided in September 2007 to develop a document to support the following statement taken from the introduction of EN 1176-1.

It is also recognised that there is an increasing need for play provision to be accessible to users with disabilities.

Germany made the proposal for a European document, as they had developed a national standard DIN 33942.

This CEN Technical Report is intended to provide guidance only.

0.2 The rights of all children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) declares: "States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity". Article 31 recognises the rights of the child to engage in play, and Article 2 states that there should be no discrimination of children irrespective of disability.

Since the introduction of EN 1176 it has been recognised that further guidance should be given on how to provide play spaces that are more accessible for children with disabilities, and encourage children of all abilities to play together. This guidance document aims to do that.

This guidance document will not mean that every play facility will be suitable for every child; the play provider may have many constraints such as a restricted budget or space limitations. However, it is hoped that, by adopting the information provided, all play spaces in some way can become more inclusive.

The document focuses on unsupervised play provision whilst recognising that carers bringing users to the facility will need to make judgements on the appropriateness of the items.

It also recognises that the person bringing the user to the facility may/could have impairments and without the ability to access the playground the non-disabled child may/could be denied the play opportunities provided.

There is a moral and legal duty upon us all to ensure that, whatever their ability, each child has a chance to reach their full potential. This will not come from focusing on the lowest common denominator of ability, but by offering each and every child a level of challenge that they can learn to manage and thus develop their skills and move on to further challenges.

It is recognised that there will always be conflict between the needs of children with different abilities and therefore we need to try to manage this conflict. The priority needs to be inclusion, and the encouragement of all children to come together through play in good quality play environments.

The alternative is exclusion – not only is this incorrect and undesirable but, as stated in "Able to Play" (Kellog Foundation, USA): "This exclusion affects children with disabilities, their siblings, and their families. Further, it affects all other children as they assign status to one another during play – those who contribute during play are expected to be contributors throughout life. This perception is established during childhood and is very difficult to alter as a youth or adult. The consequences of some children being excluded from public playgrounds has the effect of excluding them from the work of children, which sets the stage for how we interact as adults in society."

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0.3 Play for all

The term "Play for All" is used to emphasise that this document is not about how to create play spaces and play equipment just for disabled children, it is intended to give guidance on how to make play spaces and play equipment accessible to children of all abilities. It asserts moreover that all children are different, and a good play space is one that will offer play opportunities and challenges for both disabled and non-disabled children.

Play for all is play for all children and not just play for specific groups of children with or without specific disabilities. Disabled children also need to be able to play in unsupervised but safe settings alongside their siblings and friends. To achieve this, disabled children need to be fully integrated into society and it is particularly important to create opportunities for this integration within unstructured and unsupervised play environments. Disabled children should be welcomed and encouraged to use play facilities jointly with other children. As such it is important that play areas are not "dumbed down" and that challenging opportunities for very able children are still provided. The need to provide challenging environments for disabled children is just as important if not more so, as quite often the rest of their lives is spent in very closeted environments.

This Technical Report is not intended to be design restrictive and aims to follow the Design For All principles.

> "Design for All is design for human diversity, social inclusion and equality. This holistic and innovative approach constitutes a creative and ethical challenge for all planners, designers, entrepreneurs, administrators and political leaders.
>
> Design for All aims to enable all people to have equal opportunities to participate in every aspect of society. To achieve this, the built environment, everyday objects, services, culture and information – in short, everything that is designed and made by people to be used by people – needs to be accessible, convenient for everyone in society to use and responsive to evolving human diversity.
>
> The practice of Design for All makes conscious use of the analysis of human needs and aspirations and requires the involvement of end users at every stage in the design process" (source: EIDD Stockholm Declaration©, 2004).

This document is not about universal access to all play equipment but more about creating places where children of all abilities can play together. If we look to "Developing Accessible Play Space – A good practice guide" (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, UK Government) we will read: "All children do not need to access play spaces in the same way but they are all fundamentally entitled to go out to play. Good design of public play spaces is needed in order to make this possible. Each child is different – not every piece of equipment in a play space needs to be accessible to every child but access to the social experience of play is key".

This Technical Report does not focus on "impairment specific" issues but hopes to help identify obstacles to play for any child who might wish to access the play space and think about ways to circumvent them. It is also intended to highlight any conflicts between the accessibility issue and the actual requirements of EN 1176.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that disabled children have the right to be included in their local community and to do the kinds of things that non-disabled children do. Developing accessible play space is about enabling all children to be with and learn from each other. Moreover, enabling disabled children to access play spaces helps them and their families build relationships and neighbourhood networks that can bind communities and promote social inclusion. This is vital as disabled children do not want to be on their own playing by themselves on equipment labelled "disabled equipment"; they want to be out there with their non-disabled peers and brothers and sisters. As one non-disabled boy said “I want to be able to play with my brother. It makes me feel sad when I can play on things, say climbing up and he can’t. I like it when he can climb as well, maybe not so high but we are on the same things in the same playground and we can play together.” Steven, 12-year-old brother of Martin (see [1]).

0.4 Cost

Finance for providing accessible play can be an issue, often used as an excuse for not providing better play for all. Any increase in cost as a result of providing more inclusive play areas will be significantly reduced if the needs of all children are recognised from the initial design stage.

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The sections in the document cover:

— The prevalence and categorising of disability – This section covers the complexity of impairments and the importance of not focusing on specific groups such as wheelchair users, when developing open access play spaces. Additional information on this subject can be found in Annex A.

— Challenge and Risk – Providing information on the importance of challenge for all children. Having impairment should not prevent children from reaching their full potential through risk taking, and the importance of incorporating this into play spaces.

— The aims of play for all – Overall aims and considerations for good inclusive play spaces.

— Play area design and layout – Guidance on making play spaces more accessible for all.

— Equipment and types of play – Covering equipment choice and general information about encouraging multi use and integration.

Many documents were referenced in the production of this guidance document. These could provide useful additional information for play providers, so they are listed in the bibliography.

Tolerable risk is determined by the search for an optimal balance between the ideal of absolute safety and the demands to be met by a product, process or service, and factors such as benefit to the user, suitability for purpose, cost effectiveness, and conventions of the society concerned. It follows that there is a need to review continually the tolerable level, in particular when developments, both in technology and in knowledge, can lead to economically feasible improvements to attain the minimum risk compatible with the use of a product, process or service.

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