

Restoring the power of play

Introducing Playrise: the modular flatpack playground for the world's displaced children



Playrise modular play structure designed by OMMX

- New UK-based charity Playrise produces flatpack modular play structures for disaster-relief zones worldwide;
- System co-designed with refugee communities in Ethiopia and Egypt;
- Comprising timber planks, plates and beams, the reconfigurable play structures are easy to transport install, assemble and disassemble;
- On display at Museum of the Home in London on 24–26 March; the first Playrise systems are to be deployed in summer 2026.

Play is fundamental to every child's development, but for millions of kids around the world, access to play is limited or non-existent. To address this, the new UK charity Playrise has developed a modular playground system, purpose-built to restore play to displaced children living in disaster-relief zones.

Co-created with communities in Ethiopia and Egypt, Playrise structures are designed to bring the formative power of play back to those children who have been denied it through conflict or crisis. The pilot components have now been unveiled in London, and are due to be deployed in refugee camps in Aysaita in Ethiopia, and Cairo and Karkar in Egypt, later in 2026.

“As a father of two, I understand how important play is for children and the integral role it plays in their learning and development. I believe every child should have the opportunity to access designated places to play, especially those living in environments shaken by disaster and hardship.”

– Alexander Meininger, founder, Playrise

Creating Playrise

Playrise was founded by the photographer Alexander Meininger, with the aim of addressing a critical gap in support for the 48 million children living in displacement around the world.

With just 3% of humanitarian aid going towards education in fragile, conflict and violence-affected contexts, (according to World Bank data), play is far from the top of the global priority list.

Where limited funding is available, the focus is often on immediate need (food, clothing, shelter, medical supplies), with play dismissed as secondary, yet its availability has an enormous impact on the wellbeing of children. Access to play has been shown to contribute to the relief of physical stress and psychological trauma, help build positive relationships, and restore the conditions in which learning can occur.

Early in 2025, Alex brought together a team of specialists to research and develop a modular system of play structures that would be simple to transport and install wherever in the world they were most needed. Architects OMMX – a studio known for socially and environmentally responsible architecture – were selected for their ability to fuse functionality and aesthetics. Engineering design practice Webb Yates, specialists in timber and sustainable construction, were brought into the team to ensure structural stability and fabricator SetWorks joined the project to advise on costs and buildability.

That summer, in partnership with the NGOs Empowerment for Development and Save the Children, the team travelled to three humanitarian relief sites: the Aysaita

camp for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia; a hub for the Palestinian community in Cairo; and a community of Sudanese refugees in Karkar, southern Egypt.



Workshop at Aysaita Refugee Camp, Ethiopia

The Playrise team worked directly with the leaders, families and children living in displaced communities in these locations to co-design the system, hosting workshops with children and exploring the constraints of proposed play sites.

They considered diverse factors including the play needs of the community, climate and its impact on material performance, environmental impact, safety, cost-efficiency and ease of site access – all of which fed into the first prototypes.

“By engaging with the kids directly we learned that the needs and dreams of a girl in Aysaita refugee camp are not so different from the needs and dreams of a boy in North London. All children want to play – we just need to give them the space to do it.”

– Alexander Meininger, founder Playrise

As well as deploying the pilot structures this year, the Playrise team will also implement a programme of monitoring to evaluate the success of the pilot scheme.

Its findings will provide valuable – and hitherto very limited – measurable data on the impact of play on children’s development in displaced communities.

Why play matters

Much more than a luxury, play is an essential formative process through which every child develops the motor, cognitive and social skills they need to navigate the world around them. It builds strength and coordination, hones problem-solving skills, feeds imagination, and nurtures the bonds that hold communities together.

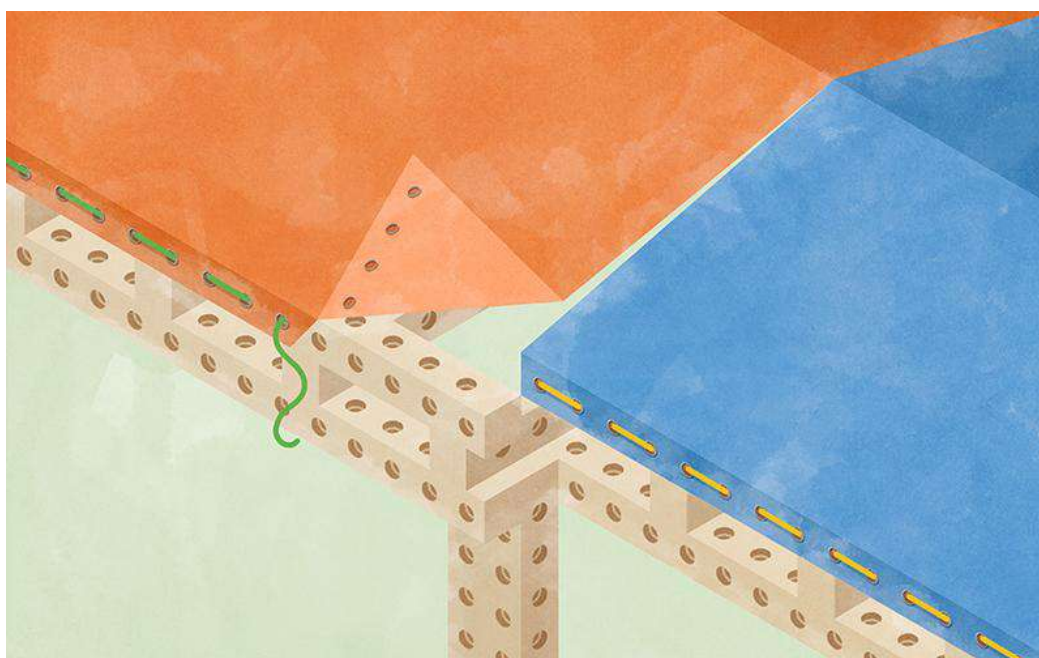
The right to play is embedded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but access to play is often limited in disaster-relief zones and refugee camps – the places where it is needed most.

“The kids are clear: they want it all. They use their phones as a window onto the wider world and they want to be part of it. We started by asking ‘Why can’t they have everything?’ and went from there. This tool allows them to shape the play they want and need, it’s about their vision, not ours.”

– Hikaru Nissanke, OMMX

The Playrise system

Created with a team comprising architects OMMX, engineers Webb Yates and fabricators Setworks, in consultation with children and NGO staff, the Playrise system is designed to be lightweight, efficient to transport and easy to assemble, disassemble and reassemble to meet the changing needs of different communities around the world.



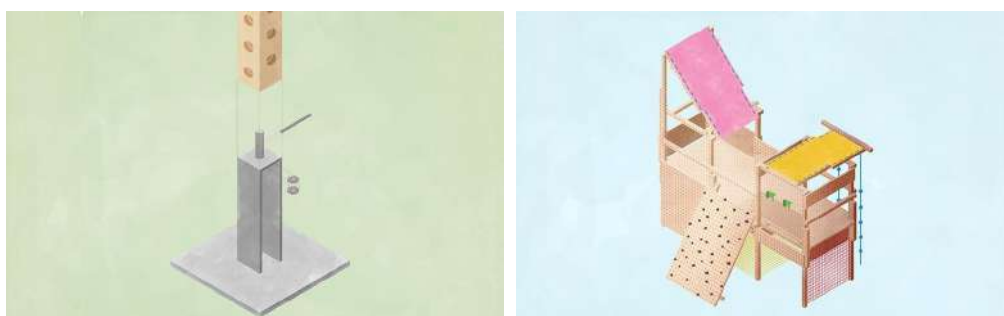
Playrise modular play structure designed by OMMX

The fundamental components of the system are beams and planks fixed together using metal connectors. These can be combined with attachments, including nets, ropes, monkey bars and basketball hoops, to enable different play experiences, and accommodate multiple levels of physical ability.

The modular nature of the system allows it to be easily configured on site, so every playspace can be tailor-made for the constraints of the location and the needs of the community using it.

In response to the team's observations of derelict playground equipment during the research phase, the system is designed so that, should any element break or degrade over time, it can be easily replaced, enabling Playrise structures to be repaired quickly and simply.

All the tools to install the playground can be found in a standard toolbox: ratchet to tighten the bolts, shovel to bury the feet, spirit level, hammer, and pliers. The bolts are fitted with a playground-specific security nut to prevent tampering.



Playrise modular play structure designed by OMMX

The pilot structures have been developed from responsibly sourced iroko, an African hardwood selected for its performance in arid environments. Long-lasting, durable, resistant to decay and insects, and considered more sustainable than teak, iroko is ideal given the demands of the climate in Asaita, where the first Playrise structures will be deployed.

"When home is a precarious thing, play isn't just about having fun; it's how children learn and how they heal. This tool gives them the chance to build and maintain their own world, keeps them engaged when they're restless, and creates a sanctuary where they are safe to just be children again."

– Hikaru Nissanke, co-founder, OMMX

Playrise launch

Playrise is launching officially in London on Tuesday 24 March 2026 at Museum of the Home, where the prototype play structures will be free to view – and play on – until 26 March.

The first Playrise playground will be constructed in Aysaita, Ethiopia in May 2026. Learnings from its use and impact will inform the design evolution of the Playrise system as it expands to serve the needs of children across the world.

For more information about Playrise, to interview the team, or to attend the launch on 24 March, please contact Sabine Zetteler at playrise@zetteler.co.uk



Workshop at Save The Children Hub, Cairo

Notes for editors

Playrise

Founded by photographer Alexander Meininger, Playrise is a UK-based non-profit aiming to improve the lives of children in global NGO relief sites worldwide by improving access to play. Modular, versatile and easy to assemble, its purpose-designed play structures require no structural foundations or specialist skills to assemble, and can be adapted to meet the changing needs of the community.

playrise.org