Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) refers to efforts to prevent and respond to abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect towards children in the aftermath of a disaster; ensuring that they receive the necessary humanitarian assistance required for their safety and wellbeing.

Safeguarding children in emergencies calls for immediate and urgent action, especially during the first few hours of a disaster. CPiE is a critical concern for UNICEF in the Europe and Central Asia region. Children are inherently dependent on adults for their safety and well-being, and separation from family and community, the loss of a parent or caregiver, displacement and the loss of home and possessions are all factors that increase children’s risk of harm. Weakened child protection services including access to justice and social welfare provision, as well as a reliance on humanitarian assistance, can further exacerbate this vulnerability. Assisting children in the context of an emergency has to be done through careful interventions which address both their immediate needs and protects them from long-term harm. CPiE is a multi-sectoral area of work involving many actors, prepared and equipped with the necessary resources to provide an effective and a well-rounded response.

Natural disasters and protracted emergencies are risks and realities across the region. Preparedness is critical, as are approaches that are able to operate in a ‘mixed environment’ where a protracted emergency rests against the development opportunities and challenges of a middle-income country. Recent years have seen an escalation of international and domestic unrest in some areas of Europe and Central Asia. The region sees large numbers of asylum seekers and migrants – many of who are children – seeking international protection in countries other than their own. Challenging living conditions with limited safe spaces for children, insufficient resources and legislative gaps, are all factors that erode the protective environment for children and must be addressed as matters of priority.