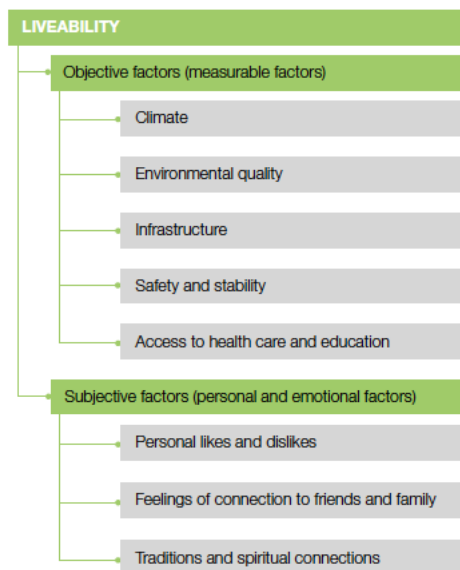# 3.2 Measuring liveability

The liveability of a place is generally measured by a number of different factors relating to quality of life. People's views about the liveability of a place can vary depending on their age, income, cultural background, lifestyle choices, values and beliefs.

The factors that influence people's ideas on liveability can be measured in two ways: by objective factors and subjective factors. Objective factors are things that can be measured and expressed as numbers, such as the cost of housing, the climate, the number of hospitals and schools, the availability of public transport, and the level of crime. Subjective factors are things that are personal, emotional and spiritual, and that cannot be easily measured or expressed as numbers. Examples of these factors are people's spiritual connections and sentimental attachments to a place (see Source 1).

Each year, a number of different companies review the liveability of cities around the world in terms of their objective factors, ranking them from the most to the least liveable. The most well-known of these surveys is conducted by an organisation called the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), which publishes an annual list of rankings. It ranks cities based on a set of criteria using objective factors. Other organisations, such as Mercer and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), also produce regular reports, with the OECD also incorporating more subjective factors into its surveys.

Objective factors

There are many different objective factors that affect liveability. The most important are introduced briefly below, then covered in more detail later in this section of the chapter.

Climate

Climate is one of the most important factors affecting the liveability of a place. Although different people like different types of weather, most people agree that a mild climate without extremes of heat or cold is ideal. Places with mild (temperate) climates often score highly in terms of liveability. The amount of rainfall is also key when it comes to climate. Too little or too much rain has a negative effect on the liveability of a place. For instance, Antarctica is a difficult place for humans to survive because it is so cold and there is not much fresh water available for drinking.

Environmental quality

The environment is another key factor that determines how liveable a place is. Environmental quality can refer to a number of characteristics relating to the natural or built environment, such as clean water and clean air. It can also be a measure of other things such as the level of pollution, rubbish or noise in an environment.

LIVEABILITY

- **Objective factors (measurable factors)**
  - Climate
  - Environmental quality
  - Infrastructure
  - Safety and stability
  - Access to health care and education
- **Subjective factors (personal and emotional factors)**
  - Personal likes and dislikes
  - Feelings of connection to friends and family
  - Traditions and spiritual connections

Source 1 Liveability can be measured by objective and subjective factors.

Infrastructure

The availability of services and facilities (such as roads, public transport, emergency services, post offices, water, sewage treatment plants, airports, housing, sporting and entertainment facilites, electricity and communications) helps make a place more or less liveable. Together these services and facilities are referred to as **infrastructure**.

Safety and stability

Safety and stability are two of the most important factors linked to the liveability of a place. More than most other things, people value feeling safe and stable in their homes. Australian cities are regarded as some of the most liveable places in the world for this reason. Safety and stability are measured by taking into account crime statistics and other information collected by the government. Many of the world's least liveable cities are found in war-torn countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where crime rates are very high and there are very few police to enforce the law. For this reason, many **refugees** flee to countries such as Australia in search of safety and stability.

Access to health care and education

In general, people living in the world's most liveable cities have access to good health care services, including doctors, public and private hospitals, specialist clinics and over-the-counter medication. They also have access to a range of schools and other education facilities, such as training centres and universities. In many of these cities, including those in Australia, a school education is not only compulsory but is also free. Cities in Canada, the USA, Australia and Western Europe generally rank highly in both

Source 2 A young schoolgirl looks through a hole in the damaged wall of her school in Gaza City following Israeli bombings in 2012. Feeling safe is a key factor that affects the liveability of places.

health care and education. African cities are the lowest ranked in the world in terms of these services.

Subjective factors

Unlike objective factors, subjective factors cannot be easily measured and compared. They are linked to personal likes and dislikes, and feelings of connection to family, friends and cultural groups. They are also linked to beliefs, traditions and spiritual connections to places. Organisations such as the OECD are now conducting life-satisfaction surveys in order to take some of these subjective factors into account when rating the liveability of different places. These surveys try to take into account how happy or sad people feel, and look for the factors in their lives and environments that cause these feelings. This information is then taken into account alongside more objective measures in order to give a more complete picture of liveability.

Check your learning 3.2

Remember and understand

1 How do companies measure the liveability of places around the world?
2 What are the objective measures of liveability for countries? Why are these important?
3 What are subjective measures of liveability and how are they measured?

Apply and analyse

4 Safety is a key liveability measure in all communities.
   a What do you think are the most important safety issues for people living in large Australian cities?
   b What do you think are the most important safety issues for people living in Gaza City (see Source 2).
   c What safety issues are similar and which are different?