1 INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in the labour market in the Netherlands has always been low. But in the 1970s and 1980s the percentage of women, especially married women, performing work in the labour market rose. In 1960 25.6 per cent of the relevant female population of 15–65 years of age participated in the labour market, in 1971 the participation rate was 30 per cent, in 1981 38.6 per cent and in 1987 it reached 50 per cent, at least if a person working for pay for at least one hour a week is counted as economically active (van der Wal, 1985, p. 41; Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 1989, p. 11). At first sight one might suppose the economic independence of Dutch women is growing. This supposition leads many policy makers to assume that no further steps are necessary to advance women's economic emancipation. But is women's participation in the labour market a good criterion for measuring their economic independence? What is the difference between labour market participation and economic independence? Why is economic independence important and what criteria can we use to measure it? First and foremost, how do we define economic independence?

2 DEFINITION OF ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

Economic independence is the main aim of the second women's movement for emancipation in the Netherlands, a movement which started in 1968. Economic independence is also one of the most important elements of the Dutch Equal Rights Policy Plan, which was accepted by the Dutch Parliament in 1985. Economic indepen-
dence is a prerequisite of equal rights, though it is not sufficient on its own to gain an equal position for women in society. Economic independence is a prerequisite for equal positions for women in fields such as political power, living space, free time, knowledge, experience, status, quality of labour, etc.

The Dutch Equal Rights Policy Plan defines economic independence as 'the situation in which all adults whatever their sex, civil status or lifestyle can build up an independent existence. In this context it means they can support themselves and look after themselves. In principle this will be achieved through a growing participation in paid work and, if they are unable to do this, through acquiring (individual) entitlement to benefits. The objective assumes as general as possible participation in paid work but also assumes just as general participation in different types of unpaid work' (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 1985, p. 26). In short, there are two elements in this definition. The first is financial independence through paid work. The second is care independence through unpaid work, that is doing domestic chores for one's own benefit and possibly for dependent children and sick persons.

The Equal Rights Policy Plan did not translate the definition of economic independence into quantitative targets. In this paper I will try to develop micro- and macro-criteria to measure how many women are economically independent and to what degree. And to measure whether more women are becoming economically independent in the course of time.

What minimum of income and time for care should one have to be economically independent? Who is to decide how much money and time are needed for a decent living? In Holland this question is as difficult to answer as anywhere else. However, Dutch law can be of assistance. All inhabitants of the Netherlands have a right to a minimum subsistence thanks to the General Assistance Law. This minimum is related to the statutory net minimum wage. For someone aged 23 or older and living alone the law provides for a benefit of 70 per cent of the statutory net minimum wage. A single parent receives 90 per cent, people living together married or unmarried 100 per cent, which means a benefit of zero if the partner has an income of 100 per cent or more of the minimum wage. People sharing the same house receive 60 per cent each. In an earlier publication, my colleague Hettie Pott and I chose 70 per cent as the minimum for economic independence, because an independent person should be able to live alone. Economic theory largely ignores unpaid work,