Our article deals with the function of the regional labour market, matching problems between labour demand and supply and the significance of the employment projects. The article is based on the evaluation report of the ESF employment projects of North Karelia.

The objective of the active labour policy is to increase the functioning of the labour market by promoting unemployed to the open labour market and to secure the availability of the skilled labour to employers. During the high demand for labour, the measures which aim at the improvement of the availability of the labour are emphasised. During recession the actions which increase the professional skill and competency of the unemployed are used.

European Social Fund Programme 2007–2013 started in North Karelia with a delay but functioned as a significant additional buffer in the recession during the years 2008 and 2009. The ESF resources were used together with the national labour policy resources for the relieving of the effects caused by the growth of unemployment.

However, many projects had to change their original objectives and to increase the number of participants. The growth of the demand for labour will not necessarily decrease unemployment immediately but measures are needed also for the solution of the structural problems. There can be problems in matching labour demand and supply also in the areas on which the unemployment rate is low if the share of the long-term unemployed and the number of the open vacancies are high simultaneously.

Attempts have been made to reduce regional differences, increase the demand for labour and increase the professional skills of unemployed by national structural adjustment support, national active labour policy and by EU programmes. Unemployment and the long-term unemployment have decreased slowly in spite of considerable support measures and resources, which on the one hand tells about the fact that the unemployment interweaves in many ways to the structures of the local labour market. On the other hand, the active labour measures or the projects financed by the EU are not able alone to solve problems but they are an addition in the solution of problems and in the developing new methods in order to improve matching demand and supply for labour.