

Eastern Europe

Testing and QA in Eastern Europe has been hit hard by the pandemic – but this is a region with determination

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If this article had been written a few months ago, it would have informed readers that the trends we highlighted for Eastern Europe in last year's World Quality Report were still very much in evidence. Key sectors such as telecommunications, banking, and utilities were still keen to implement test automation (albeit on a budget, using open source solutions), and organizations were also showing much interest in DevOps-based transformation projects.

That was then. But when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, everything changed. Budgets were cut, and quality assurance (QA) and development projects alike were put on hold, as the focus shifted to digital transformation.

A business focus in challenging times

It is in this context that we must assess responses from our Eastern European cohort in this year's survey. When we gauged the views of respondents in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, the world was still largely in lockdown – and for many of them, it appears, this brought an increased focus to their views on what was truly important in challenging times.

For instance, when asked to rate the importance of various testing and QA objectives, the responses given the highest ratings – significantly higher than for our survey respondents as a whole – were the contribution made to business outcomes (rated highly by 83% of Eastern European respondents), and ensuring end-user satisfaction (80%). Similarly, the most important aspects of IT strategy as a whole included enhancing security (rated as essential by 79% of Eastern European respondents), enhancing the customer experience (77%), and optimizing IT costs (73%). These last two – cost

optimization and customer experience – are especially conditioned by the impact of the pandemic on business, and so is the need to achieve a faster time to market (higher than the global average, at 62%).

How well did the region feel it was doing in achieving its application development targets? The picture was mixed. For example, two-thirds (66%) of Eastern European respondents felt they had the requisite tools and methods in place, and 62% felt their testing was sufficiently comprehensive – but only around one-third (32%) felt their testing was efficient in terms of speed and cost.

The perceived achievement of testing targets was also varied. A higher-than-average proportion (59%) of Eastern European respondents felt they almost always had the right level of test automation; but a lower-than-average proportion (51%) said the same about the availability of the required in-house testing environments. A particularly low proportion of the region's respondents felt they had the right testing strategy, process, or methodology (34%, against a global response of 45%). This assessment matches our own experience: while formalized testing frameworks are often evident in the field, they tend to exist as individual strategies, pursued by individual teams. In short, the approach is not unified, and QA as a whole is in consequence rendered less effective than it might otherwise be.

This year's survey also revealed the prevalence of user acceptance testing (UAT) in Eastern Europe. Well over half (55%) of the region's respondents said their teams spend more than 25% of their time on UAT, against 40% for the survey as a whole. We suspect this may be because they are spending insufficient time on testing earlier in the development cycle.

Agile and DevOps on the rise, test automation is pending

Responses indicate there has been a rise in agile adoption in Eastern Europe since last year – and an even greater rise in DevOps adoption, by a full four points, to an average usage of 29%. At the same time, waterfall mean usage has dropped to 22% from 31% last year. We see these trends in the field, and we do not expect many – or possibly any – new waterfall developments henceforth.

The region's survey participants reported challenges in an agile context. Among them were a lack of professional test expertise in agile teams (60%), and a lack of a good testing approach that fits with the organization's agile development method (55%). In our experience, the problem is not so much a familiarity with the approach, as a mismatch between the agile frameworks for QA and for the business.

There is a marked difference between Eastern Europe and the global total in terms of perceived QA and testing skills needs. The region's skills gaps are noticeably higher in areas that include knowledge of new test case design skills (identified by 42% of the region's respondents) and data analytics and AI skills (33%). We feel these figures reflect not just the relatively low maturity of QA in the area, but also insufficient knowledge of the business process context in which teams are working.

Test automation remains an area of interest for Eastern Europe, although, as we have noted, many QA innovations have been put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This may explain a seeming disparity in survey responses: as many as 79% of the region's respondents said they have the required automation tools, but only 21% said they were getting a return on their investment. It could be that, in this case, the investment is currently deemed to be more important than the short-term return. It could also be that the tools (some of them open source) are in place, but that the work involved in putting them to use is simply too costly right now. As with so many things in business, effort needs to be balanced against outcome.

Eastern Europe: the COVID-19 effect

The impact of the recent pandemic has obliged organizations in Eastern Europe to take stock. Almost half (45%) of the region's respondents said they will be increasing their focus on customer experience and usability testing – and, as we have seen, UAT figures are already high in this part of the world. A similar proportion (42%) said they will need more and better collaboration tools, which is to be expected when remote working is so much more common than hitherto.

Testing and QA budgets were anticipated to decrease by an average of 12% post-COVID. It's a sizeable drop, although smaller than in some other geographies. We feel it's likely that IT budgets overall have been hit, and hit hard – and that the 12% QA budget drop is in proportion to this larger plunge.

That said, there are grounds for cautious optimism. The major shock to the system that the pandemic has brought can also be the basis for a new perspective, and as many as 89% of Eastern European correspondents said they now feel the need to empower teams with more responsibility for quality.

Quality is indeed a shared responsibility. In order to achieve it, teams will need to find new ways to measure their activity and its results; they will need to build a stronger community culture; and they will need better communications and collaboration tools. Test automation will help, too. Put all this together with a positive mindset, and good things can happen.



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