



The WHO is teaming up with Estonia to create digital vaccination certificates based on the blockchain technology that underlies electronic currencies like Bitcoin. — Pixabay

By OTT UMMELAS

THE World Health Organization (WHO) is tapping the know-how of one of the world's most digitised nations to help unplug global travel and prevent unequal treatment once a vaccine against Covid-19 has emerged.

The WHO is teaming up with Estonia, the European Union state that helped give birth to Skype and where citizens use the Internet to vote in elections, to create digital vaccination certificates proving international passengers have had a coronavirus shot and helping to distribute vaccines to priority groups first. The certificates, to be tested in a pilot project, will be based on the blockchain technology that underlies electronic currencies like Bitcoin.

The Baltic country said that it had signed a pact with the WHO on Oct 5. The news may offer hope to companies around the world whose businesses have been ravaged by lockdowns.

## Blockchain app may solve virus passport puzzle

Cybersecurity firm Guardtime, which was founded in Estonia and is headquartered in Switzerland, will lead the 12-week pilot by enrolling "pathfinder" countries to test how well the solution can be scaled globally, including in poorer regions, according to Ain Aaviksoo, head of the company's unit in Tallinn.

"Most other blockchain solutions are lab-projects, but it's a challenge to scale them to billions of people," Aaviksoo said. "What we're offering to the WHO is speed. The solution has been tested by the US government, telecoms companies and others in terms of onboarding a massive number of parties and the stability of the system."

Aaviksoo estimates Guardtime's lead over rivals on implementation

speed to be at least a year.

With no vaccine for the coronavirus available yet, there have been proposals that people with antibodies could be issued an "immunity passport" allowing them to travel or return to work, on the assumption that they're safe from re-infection. But the World Health Organization cautioned in April that protection against a second infection among those people may not be sufficient for the idea to be effective.

"The WHO isn't doubtful about "certificates" in general but about what's being certified," Aaviksoo said. "When a vaccine has been cleared for the market, it should be effective so it makes sense to certify vaccination as a fact and set rules based on it." — Bloomberg