

SERIES

Who owns the machines

All the pieces in the series in a single document, in reading order. Updated 17 November 2026.

Who owns the machines, the energy and the data, and who risks being left out. First the problems, then the solutions put to the test, including in countries at war. The series will close with an opinion piece.

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Who owns the machines? The problems: capital, labour, energy, water

Transparency note: this piece was prepared with the assistance of Claude, the artificial intelligence model made by Anthropic. Anthropic is one of the companies taking part in the investment race described below, and is therefore one of the interested parties.

IN BRIEF

- A handful of large technology groups plan to spend almost 700 billion dollars in 2026 on data centres, chips and energy. Revenues are growing much more slowly than spending.
- Market power is concentrating in a few firms. Hiring is slowing in the most exposed occupations, and young graduates are finding less work that matches their degree.
- The race consumes energy, minerals and water, in a world where one person in four still has no safe drinking water.
- It hits hardest those with the least power: small businesses, poor countries, countries at war. This is the first of two pieces: here the problems, in the second the solutions put to the test.

THE QUESTION

Free competition works as long as competitors can stay in the market. A multinational spreads its costs over enormous turnover, optimises every step of its supply chain and can sell below cost for years. A small business cannot. Politics welcomes large companies because they bring at once what politics needs: jobs, growth, taxes. The bill comes later, in shops that close and shopping streets that empty.

Artificial intelligence speeds all of this up. Earlier industrial revolutions left whole generations time to adapt, study and change trade. This one is running faster. And whoever owns the technology, and the energy and raw materials that feed it, has an advantage the others struggle to close.

It is a question that concerns billions of people. This first piece looks at the facts: what is happening and who risks being left out. The second piece puts the solutions to the test.

WHAT THE FACTS SAY

Market power has grown, but in a few firms. The most cited study on the subject measures how much American companies charge above their costs. Between 1980 and 2016 this average margin rose from about 21% to about 61%. The most important point, however, is a different one: the typical firm did not raise its margins. A few large groups did, and they also took market share from the others (De Loecker, Eeckhout and Unger, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2020). The study covers the United States; the same authors find a similar trend in the rest of the world (De Loecker and Eeckhout, *Annual Review of Economics*). The measure is disputed: redoing the calculation on all the available data, other economists find a smaller increase, almost entirely concentrated in finance and insurance. The authors have replied (Benkard, Miller and Yurukoglu, NBER).

Investment is running ahead of earnings. For 2026 the large cloud groups have pledged almost 700 billion dollars of investment. In 2025 their revenues grew by 16.5% on average, their capital spending by 60% (Futuriom). Spending on this scale pays for itself in only two ways: with products the market does not yet buy in that quantity, or with a large saving on the cost of labour. That is why the two fears heard most often, "it's a bubble" and "it will leave us all without work", do not fully fit together. If the bubble bursts, the replacement of labour slows down, but a financial crisis arrives. If the replacement succeeds, the bubble does not burst, but labour pays the bill. We described the possible scenarios here.

Work: fewer hires, no mass layoffs yet. The broadest research so far is a study by the International Monetary Fund and the University of Chicago of about 700 million job adverts in 110 countries, from November 2021 to April 2026. In the occupations most exposed to artificial intelligence, job vacancies fell by almost 10%. Then the decline stopped, even as the models became more capable. The blow is harder where the machine can replace the person, softer where judgement, responsibility and communication are needed. On wages, so far, no clear effect (Ando, Kirti, Lin and Ilman, IMF, Working Paper 2026/220; Policy Edge summary). The most worrying signal concerns young people: in the United States 42% of graduates aged 22 to 27 work in a job that does not require a degree (Federal Reserve Bank of New York).

History says one thing, the future may say another. A review of more than a hundred studies cited by the Monetary Fund concludes that, so far, technology has created more jobs than it has destroyed. But the same Fund writes that the future path of labour demand is "exceptionally uncertain" (IMF, Dan Katz, June 2026).

Energy and raw materials decide who wins. According to the International Energy Agency, data centres will consume more than twice as much electricity in 2030 as in 2024: more than the whole of Japan uses today (IEA, *Energy and AI*). In Europe industry pays two to three times more

for electricity than in the United States (Mario Draghi at the European Parliament, 17/9/2024); a year later the gap was still about twofold (HCSS).

Water: the resource consumed twice. Data centres use water to cool their servers and, indirectly, to produce the electricity they consume. According to a report by the United Nations University, by 2030 the water footprint of the electricity consumed by data centres could reach 9,300 billion litres a year: as much as the minimum household use of all 1.3 billion inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa (UNU-INWEH, June 2026). The figure includes the water used to produce the electricity, not only the water for cooling the servers, and estimates vary a great deal depending on what is counted. The direction, though, is the same. And it falls on a world in which one person in four, about 2.1 billion, still has no safe drinking water (WHO and UNICEF, August 2025). In January 2026 the same UN institute spoke of an "era of water bankruptcy": aquifers, rivers and glaciers exploited beyond their capacity to recover, with global warming making everything worse (UNU-INWEH, January 2026).

WHO RISKS BEING LEFT OUT

The same forces do not hit everyone in the same way. The Monetary Fund asks whether artificial intelligence will help the poorest countries catch up. The answer is conditional: it can happen if it lowers the cost of learning and adapting in the weakest economies, and if those economies can turn it into more productive work (Imam and Temple, IMF, September 2026). For now it is a possibility, not a trend.

The gap is visible inside rich countries too. In 2025, 55% of large European companies used artificial intelligence, and only 17% of small ones (Eurostat). Those who start ahead accelerate.

And it is visible above all in fragile countries. There, coverage of safe drinking water is 38 points lower than in the rest of the world (WHO and UNICEF). Among the contexts of extreme fragility the OECD lists Sudan and Yemen, and it names the war in Ethiopia among those that worsen water scarcity (OECD, *States of Fragility 2025*). These are theatres this site covers. For them the artificial intelligence race and water scarcity risk adding to the war. The second piece puts the solutions to the test precisely there.

WHAT WE DRAW FROM IT

Put in a row, the facts say three things. Economic power is concentrating in a few firms, and artificial intelligence is accelerating that concentration. Work, for now, is changing more than it is disappearing, but the first signals hit young people and the jobs that are easiest to replace. And the race consumes resources that belong to no one in particular and to everyone: energy,

minerals, water. Those with the least power risk paying twice, losing work and resources together.

There is also a limit that works in favour. An economy of unemployed people does not buy. Large companies need customers with an income. This is not enough to stop the weakest from paying the bill first, but it makes the system unstable, and instability, in history, is the moment when the rules change.

WHAT TO WATCH

- **UN Water Conference, 2-4 December 2026, in the United Arab Emirates** (UNU-INWEH).
- **UN negotiation on tax cooperation, Nairobi, 30 November – 10 December 2026** (Eurodad).
- The accounts of the large cloud groups: if artificial intelligence revenues do not catch up with spending, the correction will come before the replacement of labour.

OPEN QUESTIONS

- Who pays for the water and energy consumed by data centres, and who decides where to build them?
- If technology widens the gap between those who start ahead and those who start behind, who narrows it?
- What happens to a country at war when the resources it lacks are the same ones the machines need?

Sources: De Loecker, Eeckhout and Unger, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2020 · De Loecker and Eeckhout, *Annual Review of Economics* · Benkard, Miller and Yurukoglu, NBER · Futuriom · Ando, Kirti, Lin and Ilman, IMF, Working Paper 2026/220 · Policy Edge summary · Federal Reserve Bank of New York · IMF, Dan Katz, June 2026 · IEA, *Energy and AI* · Mario Draghi at the European Parliament, 17/9/2024 · HCSS · UNU-INWEH, June 2026 · WHO and UNICEF, August 2025 · UNU-INWEH, January 2026 · Imam and Temple, IMF, September 2026 · Eurostat · WHO and UNICEF · OECD, *States of Fragility 2025* · UNU-INWEH · Eurodad

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Who owns the machines? The solutions, and who is left out

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IN BRIEF

- The seven solutions most often proposed against the concentration of economic power, each against its strongest objection. Each one already works somewhere, with measured results.
- Hospitals where the machine helps the doctor without replacing them, citizens who receive a share of their land's wealth every year, worker-owned companies, a country where almost everyone works fewer hours without losing pay.
- But almost always in places that are rich, small or cohesive. In the countries at war this site covers, from Palestine to Sudan, from Cuba to Venezuela, only the solutions that grow from below hold out.
- And they work only until someone else flips the switch: whoever controls cash, energy, banks or the network.

THE QUESTION

The first piece ended with a harsh picture: a few groups own the machines, the energy and the data, and those with less strength risk paying twice (Who owns the machines? The problems). The proposed solutions exist. The question is whether they work, where, and for whom.

SEVEN SOLUTIONS PUT TO THE TEST

For each one: what it proposes, the strongest objection, where it already works, what is missing.

1. The machine helps, the human decides and is accountable

The proposal. By law, diagnoses, rulings, technical sign-offs, credit decisions and the use of force remain with a person.

The objection. A machine that calculates thousands of scenarios can judge better than a human. Limiting it to protect human work means giving up better decisions.

Where it already works. The strongest example comes from Sweden, from breast cancer screening. The MASAI trial, with about 106,000 women, compared two methods: the standard reading of mammograms by two radiologists, and a reading in which artificial intelligence helps the radiologists, who remain the only ones to decide. With the machine's help, 29% more cancers were found, almost all small and still localised, without more false alarms (Lund University), and the doctors' reading workload fell by 44% (*The Lancet* press release, via EurekAlert). The full results, published in January 2026 in *The Lancet*, also show 12% fewer cancers diagnosed between one screening and the next, that is, missed at the first reading: 82 against 93. This figure should be read with caution: the trial was designed to show that the new method is not worse, and on this measure the difference is not enough to rule out chance (*The Lancet*, via PubMed). The authors themselves warn that the trial covers one country, one type of machine and one system. The result does not say that the machine is better than the doctor. It says that a doctor helped by the machine finds more cancers than two doctors without it, with almost half the work.

The law is also moving in this direction. The European regulation on artificial intelligence requires high-risk systems to be designed so that a person can really oversee them, and that those overseeing them are able to recognise the tendency to trust the machine too much (AI Act, Article 14). For remote biometric identification, no decision may be taken on the basis of the system unless at least two people have verified it (euaiact.com). But these obligations, which were due to apply from August 2026, have been postponed: under the agreement of 7 May 2026 between Parliament and Council they will start on 2 December 2027, and on 2 August 2028 for systems built into products that are already regulated (Hogan Lovells, via JD Supra). We described the tools for governing these machines here.

What is missing. The objection confuses calculation with responsibility. A machine cannot be put on trial, cannot be fired, does not pay for its mistakes. The rule holds if the human really decides. If it becomes a rubber stamp put by habit on whatever the machine proposes, it does not hold: we have seen this in war (Minab). And the European regulation excludes military applications.

2. Tax where the money is really made

The proposal. Shift the tax burden from labour to capital and rents.

The objection. Tax whom, and where? Multinationals declare their profits in the countries that suit them.

Where it already works. In September 2024 the Court of Justice of the European Union closed a case that had lasted eight years. It ruled that Ireland had granted Apple illegal tax advantages from 1991 to 2014, and that Apple must pay back 13 billion euros in unpaid taxes (ICIJ). In one year, an Irish subsidiary of Apple had recorded about 16 billion in profits, but declared only 50 million as taxable (Channel 4). The ruling shows that a large enough market, with common rules, can make even the most powerful companies pay.

A second path is open now. A Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation is being negotiated at the UN. African countries proposed it in 2022, to move tax rule-making from the OECD, which brings together 38 advanced economies, to the UN, where 193 states sit (Accounting Times). The negotiation is due to close by mid-2027, and the next session is held in Nairobi from 30 November to 10 December 2026 (Eurodad).

What is missing. The 15% global minimum tax was supposed to solve exactly this problem. In June 2025 the G7 agreed to exempt American multinationals, which will pay only under United States rules (IBFD); in January 2026 the exemption was endorsed by about 150 countries (Bloomberg Tax). Taxing where sales are made remains possible. The European Union, with about 450 million inhabitants (Eurostat), has the weight to do it. The price is American trade retaliation, and that is why so far it has chosen not to pay it.

3. Give everyone a share of the wealth

The proposal. Public funds or forms of widespread ownership that give citizens and workers a part of capital and its returns.

The objection. No entrepreneur voluntarily divides the wealth they have built up, let alone for free.

Where it already works. None of these models rests on generosity. All of them rest on a rule.

In Alaska, since 1976, the state constitution requires at least 25% of oil and mineral royalties to be paid into a permanent fund (APFC). The fund invests worldwide and, since 1982, has paid a cash dividend every year to every resident, whatever their age or origin (Cato Institute). The underlying idea is that the state's oil belongs to all its citizens. The same idea can be applied to other common resources: data, energy, networks.

In Mondragón, in the Basque Country, a network of cooperatives founded in 1956 today has about 71,400 people and more than 11 billion euros in sales (Mondragon, 2025 report). The members own the company and vote on strategy in their assembly. When Fagor, the largest of the cooperatives, failed in 2013, 95% of the almost 2,000 workers left without a job were relocated within the network (Christian Science Monitor). But the model also has its limits: the largest industrial cooperatives control more than a hundred subsidiaries abroad, whose employees are wage earners and not members (Analyse & Kritik, 2025).

In the United Kingdom a 2014 law introduced tax advantages for those who sell their company to a trust that holds it on behalf of the employees. In March 2026 there were about 2,800 employee-owned businesses, with about 548,000 worker-owners (TLT). When the government halved the relief, in November 2025, new take-up slowed (ACCA). The British case confirms the rule: widespread ownership grows when politics encourages it.

What is missing. A fund like Alaska's built on the returns of artificial intelligence does not yet exist anywhere. It could be fed by taxes on digital services or by charges for the use of energy and public data. That is why the third solution depends on the second.

4. A Europe that gives everyone the tools

The proposal. Antitrust that is really enforced, open models, public computing capacity accessible to small businesses.

The objection. The investment needed is out of reach. Europe has committed to rearm and pays far more for energy than its competitors, and this is bringing heavy industry to its knees.

Where it already works. Europe does not need to win the race for the most powerful models to give its companies the tools, and something is moving.

Public computing already exists. The European joint undertaking for supercomputing runs 19 "AI factories" and 13 linked sites, which offer free, tailored support to small businesses and start-ups (EuroHPC). Access for industrial innovation is free for small and medium-sized enterprises, which can get in within two working days (Bayern Innovativ; LUMI).

The cost of using artificial intelligence is collapsing. According to Stanford University's annual report, querying a model at the level of GPT-3.5 cost 20 dollars per million words processed in November 2022 and 7 cents in October 2024: about 280 times less in eighteen months. The fall is due to more efficient hardware and to smaller but capable models, and the gap between the best closed models and the best open ones has almost disappeared (Stanford HAI, AI Index 2025). Building the largest models remains a business for the few. Using them, less and less so.

Competition rules are starting to bite. In April 2025 the European Commission applied the Digital Markets Act for the first time: a 500 million euro fine for Apple and 200 million for Meta (European Commission).

Energy, too, can go back to citizens. In Espoo, Finland, waste heat from Microsoft's data centres warms homes through the district heating network: it will cover about 40% of demand, in place of coal (City of Espoo).

What is missing. The objection about energy and budgets is true. Russian gas cost less, and it was also a lever for blackmail: both things are true. And every euro spent on rearmament is a euro that does not go into computing, power grids and training (we discuss this in the series "Peace and rearmament"). But the real knot is the one seen in the first piece: in 2025, 55% of large European companies used artificial intelligence and only 17% of small ones (Eurostat). The gap depends less on the technology than on the ability to turn it into everyday work (European Business Magazine). The tools are there. What is missing are the people to help small businesses use them.

5. Small businesses: from the niche to the network

The proposal. Bet on what cannot be multiplied endlessly: handmade work, quality, tailored service, the relationship with the customer.

The objection. It will remain a tiny share. And if everyone moves into niches, specialities multiply and supply outstrips demand.

Where it already works. The objection is right: niches on their own are a refuge for the few. But small businesses have two other cards, which do not depend on the niche.

The first is that artificial intelligence helps most those who start furthest behind. The most cited study on the subject followed more than 5,000 customer support agents at a large software company. With an assistant based on artificial intelligence, average productivity rose by 15%. The less experienced and less skilled workers improved speed and quality; the most experienced gained little (Brynjolfsson, Li and Raymond, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2025). The machine passed on to newcomers the way the best people work. A small business that cannot afford an expert for every function can use this tool to get closer to those who can.

The second card is the network. Mondragón was born from five young people who came out of a vocational school (KIT). Many small businesses that on their own cannot afford a data expert, a purchasing office or a digital infrastructure can pay for them together, in a consortium or a cooperative.

What is missing. The customer support study measures one company, in one sector. And those using these tools today are mostly large companies. Without networks, advice and training designed for the small, the advantage stays with those who already have it.

6. Politics: who imposes the rules

The proposal. All of the above, decided by governments.

The objection. Politicians would have to tread on the toes of those who fund them. Very difficult.

Where it already works. It is the root of everything, and history shows that it is not an insurmountable wall. The world's first compulsory social insurance was introduced by Bismarck in Germany, with the health insurance law of 1883. He did not do it out of generosity, but to cut the ground from under the socialists (Smithsonian Magazine). After Germany, every country in Western Europe adopted at least one of these programmes (Social Evolution & History). When instability threatens those who govern, the rules change.

Large groups lose in court today too. In August 2024 an American federal judge ruled that Google had illegally maintained a monopoly in online search (AP, via PBS). The Apple ruling in Europe and the Digital Markets Act fines point in the same direction. And the UN tax negotiation was born from the initiative of African countries, not of the strongest.

What is missing. The victories are partial. In September 2025 the same judge decided that Google will not have to sell the Chrome browser or Android, and may keep paying to be the default search engine (The Register). Rules change when there is organised pressure: unions, business associations, citizens, states that join forces. In Iceland, the shorter working week trials started precisely from campaigns by unions and civil society (Fox 5).

7. Work less, for the same pay

The proposal. Share out productivity gains by cutting working hours.

The objection. If wages already fall short today for the needs we have been taught to have, dividing pay would satisfy no one.

Where it already works. The proposal does not ask to divide the same cake, but to use the new part, produced by the machines, to pay for fewer hours. It has happened before, and it is one of the most successful economic stories ever. In 1870 a worker in the rich countries worked

between 50 and 70 hours a week; today they work roughly half that (Our World in Data). Over the same period real wages grew as never before.

It happens today too. In Iceland, between 2015 and 2019, about 2,500 public sector workers went from 40 to 35-36 hours a week without losing pay. Productivity and services stayed the same or improved in most cases. After the trials, 86% of the country's workforce moved to shorter hours or gained the right to do so (Alda and Autonomy). In the United Kingdom 61 companies tried the four-day week on the same pay, in 2022. A year later, 54 were still applying it and 31 had made it permanent (FM Magazine).

What is missing. The trials mostly concern offices and public services, and the companies taking part choose to do so voluntarily. When you try to make it a law for everyone, the fight moves to parliament. In September 2025 the Spanish Congress rejected, by 178 votes to 170 (People's Party, Vox, Junts and UPN against the government), the proposal to cut the working week from 40 to 37.5 hours without pay cuts (El Salto); business associations feared costs too high for the smallest firms (Boundless). It works if the gains really reach wages, and that brings us back to the second and sixth solutions. The question of needs we have been taught to have is serious, but it is another discussion.

WHO IS LEFT OUT: THE TEST OF COUNTRIES AT WAR

The examples seen so far almost all come from places that are rich, small or cohesive: Alaska, Iceland, the Basque Country, Sweden, Finland. It is a serious limit. That a solution works where there is already money, institutions and trust does not prove that it works where they are missing.

There is, however, one example that does not come from a rich country. In 2016 India built a public digital payments system, free for citizens: UPI. Today more than 500 million people and 65 million merchants use it (Free Press Journal). The benefit is strongest for the self-employed, such as street vendors (NBER), and the system has widened access to credit without raising defaults (NBER). There are limits here too: in a survey of 722 street vendors, one in three still does not accept digital payments (ISB, via Mediainfoline). But a lower-middle-income country has given small players a tool that before only the big ones had.

The hardest test remains: the countries at war or under siege, the ones this site covers. We put the seven solutions to the test in six of them.

Country	What holds out	What it depends on
Palestine	digital wallets, above all in Gaza	Israel: tax revenue, cash, correspondent banks
Sudan	volunteer networks	donors and payment channels
Ethiopia	a public digital wallet	the state, sole operator
Cuba	small private businesses	the American oil blockade and the Cuban government
Venezuela	oil revenue	the United States, which oversees the proceeds
Somalia	money on the phone	a few private companies

Palestine. Taxes on goods entering the West Bank and Gaza are collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, under the 1994 Paris Protocol. They are about two thirds of the Authority's revenue (Arab Center Washington DC). Since 2025 Israel has been withholding them: at the start of 2026 about 4.4 billion dollars were blocked, according to the Palestinian government (WAFA). Two reasons have been given. Israeli Finance Minister Smotrich linked the block to the wave of recognitions of the Palestinian state (J Street). The second comes from a 2018 Israeli law: every year Israel calculates how much the Authority has paid to prisoners and to the families of those who died carrying out attacks, and withholds the same amount. Israel argues that those payments encourage violence; for Palestinians the prisoners are fighters for independence, and their families deserve support (Reuters, via Gulf News). "We will not transfer funds that end up with terrorists," Smotrich said (JNS). In June 2026 the Knesset made some of these deductions permanent (MAS, July 2026). In Gaza the banks are destroyed and cash does not get in. Digital wallets have become the way to survive (The New Arab), but they depend on Israeli correspondent banks, and Israel has floated the possibility of cutting that access (Atlantic Council). Those who need cash buy it from intermediaries, with commissions that have exceeded 50% (The Progressive). Here the second solution exists in reverse: taxes are collected, but someone else pockets them.

Sudan. In much of the country the state no longer exists (we wrote about it here). What has held up are the "emergency response rooms", volunteer networks born from the neighbourhood committees of the 2019 revolution (Sigrid Rausing Trust) and organised in chat groups (Social Science in Action). There are about 700 of them and they have reached about 12 million people (Cordaid). In 2026 they received the Chatham House Prize (The National). It is the fifth solution in its purest form: a network from below, without a state. But it lives on donations, and the money arrives by long routes and with losses (ODI, via Polity).

Ethiopia. In 2021 the state telephone company launched Telebirr, a wallet on the phone. In five years it has reached almost 59 million users and connected more than 16 million people to credit from banks and microfinance (Capital Ethiopia). It is a form of the fourth solution: a public infrastructure that reaches the small. But it is run by a state monopoly, built with Huawei technology (Capacity Media), in a country that has come out of a war and faces new tensions on its borders (we wrote about it here). Whoever controls the network also decides who can pay.

Cuba. Since 2021 small and medium-sized private businesses have been allowed (AFP, via Malay Mail); in September 2026 there were 10,568 of them, according to the Cuban statistics office (ONEI, via Periódico Cubano). Since the end of January an American oil blockade has multiplied blackouts and shortages (Al Jazeera; we wrote about it here), and the lack of fuel affects more than 96% of these businesses (Auge, via Translating Cuba). In July the government also opened pharmacies and petrol stations to private firms (AFP, via Zeta). The small businesses are there. The energy is decided by others, in Washington and in Havana.

Venezuela. After the American military operation of January 2026 that removed Maduro, oil sanctions were eased and exports rose to their highest levels since 2019 (ION Analytics). An executive order of 9 January governs the custody of Venezuelan oil proceeds, which remain under American supervision (K2 Integrity). It is the Alaska model in reverse: the wealth of the land is there, but another state watches over the till. Meanwhile many Venezuelans struggle to eat on the wages they have (NPR).

Somalia (outside the theatres we follow, but useful). From 1991 to 2009 the country had no functioning central bank (LSE). Today more than 70% of adults use money on the phone, while only about 15% have a bank account (SIMAD, on World Bank data). Private telephone companies built it, without a state. But one of them, in practice, acts as the bank (Quartz): concentration returns here too.

What the test teaches. In countries at war the solutions that need a strong state do not get off the ground: taxation, antitrust, public funds, laws on working hours. What holds out is what grows from below or goes through the phone: volunteer networks, small businesses, digital money. But even these work only until someone else flips the switch: whoever controls cash, energy, banks, the network or the till. It is the question in the title taken to the extreme. Here whoever owns the machines decides whether a people can pay, work and eat. For these countries artificial intelligence risks being a second exclusion, after that of war. And reconstruction, when it comes, will raise the same question: whose will it be? In Gaza the plan presented at Davos in January 2026 relies on foreign private capital, and Palestinians do not sit where decisions are made (Al-Monitor; Al Jazeera; we wrote about it here).

WHAT IS LEFT STANDING

Lined up, the seven solutions are not utopias: each one works somewhere. But almost always where there was already economic strength, institutions and trust, or in small experiments. The test of countries at war splits them into two groups.

The first group requires strength: taxing large groups, enforcing antitrust, creating public funds, changing working hours by law. It is within reach of few: large blocs like the European Union, states with solid institutions. The second can grow from below: cooperatives, mutual aid networks, simple public digital infrastructure. These were also born in scarcity: Mondragón from five young people from a vocational school, Sudan's emergency rooms in the middle of a war, digital payments in a lower-middle-income India.

A divided world makes common rules difficult. But it also makes a single monopoly harder: the European Union imposed its digital rules on its own, India built its infrastructure without asking permission. And institutions get copied: after Bismarck's Germany, within a few decades all of Western Europe adopted social insurance.

WHERE IT IS BEING DECIDED NOW

- **In Nairobi, from 30 November to 10 December 2026**, the UN convention on tax cooperation is being negotiated. It is where it will be decided whether profits are taxed where they are made or where it suits companies to declare them.
- **The European AI factories** are open free of charge to small and medium-sized enterprises for innovation. Few know it.
- **The European rules on human oversight** of high-risk systems have been postponed to December 2027. There is a year to decide whether they will be a formality or a real obligation, and that will also depend on who demands them.

OUR ASSESSMENT

We started this series with a grim question: what will become of workers and small businesses? The solutions do not need to be invented: they exist, they have names and places. But they are not for everyone. They work where there is already strength, and those with less risk being left out twice: out of the wealth and out of the tools to defend themselves. In countries at war the question "who owns the machines" becomes "who holds the switch", and the answer is almost never the people who live there. So the problem is not technical, it is about power.

But hope is not over. The things that hold out even in war, volunteer networks, small businesses, payments on the phone, grow from below and cost little. And history shows that

institutions get copied: when they work in one place, sooner or later others demand them too. Those with more strength, like Europe, have an extra duty: not only to use it for themselves, but not to flip the switch on others.

OPEN QUESTIONS

- If a machine gets a diagnosis, a ruling or a target wrong, who is accountable?
- Can Europe use the weight of its market to make those who sell to its citizens pay, even at the cost of a trade war?
- Why is there still no common fund fed by the returns of artificial intelligence, like Alaska's with oil?
- Who helps small businesses use the tools that already exist?
- When Gaza, Sudan or Ukraine are rebuilt, who will own what is built?

Sources: Lund University · *The Lancet* press release, via EurekAlert · *The Lancet*, via PubMed · AI Act, Article 14 · euaiact.com · Hogan Lovells, via JD Supra · ICIJ · Channel 4 · Accounting Times · Eurodad · IBFD · Bloomberg Tax · Eurostat · APFC · Cato Institute · Mondragon, 2025 report · Christian Science Monitor · Analyse & Kritik, 2025 · TLT · ACCA · EuroHPC · Bayern Innovativ · LUMI · Stanford HAI, AI Index 2025 · European Commission · City of Espoo · Eurostat · European Business Magazine · Brynjolfsson, Li and Raymond, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2025 · KIT · Smithsonian Magazine · Social Evolution & History · AP, via PBS · The Register · Fox 5 · Our World in Data · Alda and Autonomy · FM Magazine · El Salto · Boundless · Free Press Journal · NBER · NBER · ISB, via Mediainfoline · Arab Center Washington DC · WAFA · J Street · Reuters, via Gulf News · JNS · MAS, July 2026 · The New Arab · Atlantic Council · The Progressive · Sigrid Rausing Trust · Social Science in Action · Cordaid · The National · ODI, via Polity · Capital Ethiopia · Capacity Media · AFP, via Malay Mail · ONEI, via Periódico Cubano · Al Jazeera · Auge, via Translating Cuba · AFP, via Zeta · ION Analytics · K2 Integrity · NPR · LSE · SIMAD, on World Bank data · Quartz · Al-Monitor · Al Jazeera

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