



Marking 28 years of impact, the 2026 L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards honor five pioneering researchers

Paris, 19 May 2026 – The Fondation L'Oréal and UNESCO are proud to announce the names of the five international Laureates of the 2026 L'Oréal-UNESCO *For Women in Science* International Awards.

On 11 June at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, **these researchers will be recognized for their pioneering contributions to life and environmental sciences.** This year's selection highlights their major roles in tackling global health and environmental challenges, from revolutionary tissue engineering and genomic research to agricultural innovation and the impact of nutrition on mental health.

For this 28th edition, the programme has reached an unprecedented scale, reflecting the growing excellence of women in science worldwide. The Laureates were selected from a record 504 nominations representing 89 countries, and now **join the more than 5,000 women who have been recognized by the programme so far** for the excellence of their research, including now 142 International Award Laureates, among whom seven have received a Nobel Prize in science.

This rigorous selection was conducted by an independent international jury chaired by Professor Brigitte L. Kieffer, Research Director Emeritus at the National Institute for Health and Medical Research (INSERM) France, Member of the French Academy of Sciences and former Laureate of the L'Oréal-UNESCO *For Women in Science* International Awards.

Fondation L'Oréal and UNESCO renew landmark partnership for six more years to advance gender equality in science

While these five exceptional women embody the heights of scientific achievement, they also represent a broader reality: true gender parity remains a distant goal.

According to UNESCO data, women still account for only one in three researchers globally. This imbalance does more than limit diversity - it introduces bias into research and risks overlooking the very perspectives needed to solve our world's most pressing challenges.

To bridge this gap, the Fondation L'Oréal and UNESCO have been working together for 28 years. This edition marks a historic milestone: the official six-year renewal of a landmark partnership. This extension cements the organization's shared ambition to build a truly intergenerational approach to supporting women in science - from the For Girls in Science programme inspiring high school students, to regional initiatives supporting young researchers in 140 countries and territories, and the prestigious International Awards honoring the world's most distinguished scientific minds.

LAUREATES OF THE 2026 L'ORÉAL-UNESCO FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

LAUREATE FOR AFRICA AND THE ARAB STATES

Professor Liesl Zühlke – Cardiac and Cardiovascular systems

Professor at the University of Cape Town & Vice President of the South African Medical Research Council, South Africa

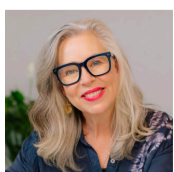


Rewarded for improving care for children with heart conditions especially rheumatic heart disease (RHD) that disproportionately affects children living in poverty. Dr Zühlke's research repositioned RHD as a socio-political issue tied to health system deficiencies and inequities. Her dedication to scientific excellence, leadership in global health, and capacity building activities have improved the lives of vulnerable children with cardiovascular disease.

LAUREATE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Professor Felice Jacka – Psychiatry

Deakin Distinguished Professor, OAM, and Director of the Food & Mood Centre at Deakin University, Australia



Rewarded for establishing the field of nutritional psychiatry. Professor Jacka's research unravels the complex relationship between diet and mental and brain health and recognises diet and nutrition as risk factors for mental disorders. Her leadership in training, providing evidence-based resources to professionals and the public, has transformed how mental health is understood and care practiced globally.

LAUREATE FOR EUROPE

Professor Sarah A. Teichmann – Cell Biology

FMedSci FRS, Chair in Stem Cell Medicine at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom



Rewarded for her outstanding interdisciplinary research using genome science and computational biology to understand the human body at single cell resolution. Professor Teichmann's pioneering work in single-cell technologies provides fundamental resources for biomedical research, drug discovery, and public health. She is an inspiring role model, an advocate for inclusion in science, and a leading educator.

LAUREATE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Professor Raquel Lia Chan – Agricultural biotechnology

Superior Researcher at CONICET; Professor at the National University of Litoral (UNL); Director of the Litoral Agrobiotechnology Institute (CONICET-UNL), Argentina



Rewarded for transforming fundamental plant biology into agricultural innovation through her discovery of genes and biological mechanisms that enhance plant tolerance to changing environments. Professor Chan translated this knowledge into drought-tolerant wheat, maize, rice, and soybean varieties, contributing to global food security. She is a visionary leader and devoted mentor who has trained a future generation of plant scientists.

LAUREATE FOR NORTH AMERICA

Professor Gordana Vunjak-Novakovic – Bioengineering

University Professor, Mikati Foundation Professor of Biomedical Engineering at Columbia University, USA



Rewarded for her pioneering work in human tissue engineering and regenerative medicine. Professor Vunjak-Novakovic's exceptional contributions in developing "organs-on-a-chip" and biological substitutes to repair, maintain or improve tissue function have been instrumental in recapitulating organ physiology. Her outstanding track record as an innovator, educator, and role model for women in science and engineering is inspirational.

"By reaching the milestone of 5,000 female researchers supported worldwide and renewing our historic partnership with UNESCO, we are mobilizing more than ever to defend the place of women in science." said **Jean-Paul Agon, President of the Fondation L'Oréal**. "Our faith in

research is absolute; it is the only answer to the world's complexity. From high school students to the world-renowned Laureates we celebrate today, we are building an intergenerational chain of excellence where every woman can shape the future of progress."

"Women scientists are not only advancing research, they are expanding what we believe is possible. In a world where science has never been more essential, we cannot afford to leave half of humanity's talent on the sidelines. As we enter the International Decade of Science for Sustainable Development, the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science programme is proof that excellence and equality must advance together. These five Laureates are an inspiration to their peers, and to the millions of girls who will, in turn, follow in their footsteps.", **said Khaled El-Enany, Director-General of UNESCO.**

About the Fondation L'Oréal

The Fondation L'Oréal supports and empowers women to shape their future and make a difference in society. It focuses its action on two main areas: science and inclusive beauty.

Science: encouraging women's scientific excellence and inspiring future generations.

The Fondation L'Oréal is committed to supporting women scientists at every stage of their careers, from sparking vocations at a young age to recognizing excellence in established researchers. This commitment translates into an intergenerational approach and dedicated programmes.

In partnership with UNESCO, Fondation L'Oréal has run the *For Women in Science* programme since 1998. This programme aims to accelerate the careers of women scientists, remove the obstacles they face, and inspire younger generations to embrace scientific careers. To date, the programme has supported more than 5,000 researchers from over 140 countries, promoting scientific excellence and encouraging many young women to pursue scientific studies. The Fondation L'Oréal, together with UNESCO, also invests in the future of women in science through the *For Girls in Science* programme. This programme aims to inspire scientific vocations in young girls by raising their awareness of the scientific challenges of tomorrow and introducing them to inspiring female role models. The goal is to support and encourage the next generation of female scientists, giving them the keys to succeed in scientific fields.

Inclusive Beauty: restoring self-esteem and promoting professional integration.

Convinced that beauty contributes to the process of rebuilding lives, the Fondation L'Oréal helps vulnerable women to improve their self-esteem through free beauty and wellness treatments. These treatments help restore their self-esteem and help them regain confidence. At the same time, the Fondation L'Oréal promotes the professional integration of vulnerable women through excellent training in beauty professions. Since the program's founding in 2007, more than 190,000 women have benefitted from socio-aesthetics treatments, and more than 96,000 women have participated in the trainings.

About UNESCO

With 194 Member States, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization contributes to peace and security by leading multilateral cooperation on education, science, culture, communication and information. Headquartered in Paris, UNESCO has offices in 54 countries and employs over 2300 people. UNESCO oversees more than 2000 World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks; networks of Creative, Learning, Inclusive and Sustainable Cities; and over 13 000 associated schools, university chairs, training and research institutions, with a global network of 200 National Commissions. Its Director-General is Khaled El-Enany.

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" – UNESCO Constitution, 1945.

More information: www.unesco.org

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