



Five outstanding researchers win L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards 2024

Paris, 14 May – The Fondation L'Oréal and UNESCO are proud to reveal the names of the five laureates of the 2024 L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards. On 28 May, at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, these researchers will be honoured for their pioneering research in life and environmental sciences, and in particular for their major contribution to tackling global public health challenges ranging from cancer to infectious diseases such as malaria and polio and chronic illnesses such as obesity, diabetes and epilepsy.

Every year, the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards honour an exceptional woman from each of the five broad regions: Africa and the Arab States; Asia and the Pacific; Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; and North America.

The laureates of this 26th edition have been selected from among 350 candidates worldwide by an independent international jury chaired by Professor Brigitte L. Kieffer, Research Director at the *Inserm Research Institute*, member of the French Academy of Sciences and former laureate of L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards.

Through the excellence of their work, they demonstrate that science needs women more than ever, for example to meet major public health challenges, at a time when cancer cases could increase by 77% by 2050, obesity now affects 1 in 8 people worldwide, and there are still more than 249 million cases of malaria infection. (Source: World Health Organization)

THE 2024 LAUREATES OF THE L'ORÉAL-UNESCO FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE INTERNATIONAL AWARD



LAUREATE FOR AFRICA AND THE ARAB STATES

Professor Rose Leke - Immunology

Former Head of the Department of Infectious Diseases and Immunology, Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and Former Director of the Biotechnology Centre, University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon

She is rewarded for her dedicated leadership, outstanding research and pioneering efforts to improve outcomes in pregnancy-associated malaria, support the eradication of polio and improve immunization in Africa, as well as for her efforts to improve the career path of young scientists.

Dr Leke's national, regional, and global influence has had a profound impact on public health in her native Cameroon and across Africa. Her achievements position her as a role model, leading educator and advocate for young female scientists.



LAUREATE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Professor Alicia Kowaltowski – Biochemistry

Professor of Biochemistry, University of São Paulo, Brazil

She is rewarded for her fundamental contribution to the biology of mitochondria, which are "the cell's main energy source, acting as their batteries". Her work has been critical for our understanding of the implication of energy metabolism in chronic diseases, including obesity and diabetes, as well as in ageing.

Her outstanding contribution as an investigator and mentor, as well as her advocacy for science in Latin America and its dissemination to the public, are an inspiration for young scientists.



LAUREATE FOR NORTH AMERICA

Professor Nada Jabado - Human genetics

Professor, Departments of Pediatrics and Human Genetics, Canada Research Chair Tier 1 in Pediatric Oncology, McGill University, Canada

She is rewarded for revolutionizing our comprehension of the genetic defects responsible for aggressive pediatric brain tumours. Her seminal discovery of the first-ever histone mutations in human disease, referred to as oncohistones, has sparked a fundamental change in the cancer research sphere.

Through her innovative research and effective leadership in establishing a global collaborative network, she has reshaped the medical approach to pediatric cancer, advancing both diagnostic capabilities and clinical treatments for young patients.



LAUREATE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Professor Nieng Yan - Structural biology

University Professor, School of Life Sciences, Tsinghua University; Founding President of Shenzhen Medical Academy of Research and Translation; Director of Shenzhen Bay Laboratory, China

She is rewarded for discovering the atomic structure of multiple membrane proteins that mediate the traffic of ions and sugars across the cell membrane, revealing principles that govern cross-membrane transport.

Her exceptional research has informed multiple disorders such as epilepsy and arrhythmia and guided the treatment of pain syndrome. As a leading authority in her field, Dr Yan inspires female scientists globally and is a strong advocate for gender equality in research and science education.



LAUREATE FOR EUROPE

Professor Geneviève Almouzni - Molecular biology

Director of Research from The National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) at the Curie Institute, France

She is rewarded for her seminal contributions to understanding how DNA is packaged with proteins inside the cell nucleus. Her pioneering work in epigenetics has furthered our understanding of how cell identity is determined during normal development and disrupted by cancer.

Her extraordinary successes in advancing research, training the next generation of scientists and promoting women in science are inspirational.

26 YEARS OF EMPOWERING WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Today, women still only account for one in three researchers globally (33%) according to UNESCO data.¹ Furthermore, the glass ceiling remains a reality – only a quarter of scientific leadership roles are held by women in Europe² and only 25 women have won the Nobel prize in science since its creation in 1901³.

For 26 years, the Fondation L'Oréal and UNESCO have worked together to promote gender equality in science through the *For Women in Science International Awards* and the *Young Talents Programmes* covering more than 140 countries, shining the spotlight on female scientists and contributing to breaking the glass ceiling in science.

Since its creation, the L'Oréal-UNESCO *For Women in Science* programme has honoured more than 4 400 women for the excellence of their research, including 132 laureates of the International Awards and more than 4 000 young female researchers. Among the laureates, 7 have received a Nobel Prize in science.

Alexandra Palt, Executive Director of the Fondation L'Oréal, said: *"A sustainable future for humanity depends on real equality between men and women. This is unfortunately still not the case today in science, although the world faces unprecedented challenges. The L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science programme has ensured that this question has remained at the heart of the debate for 26 years. In particular, we have sought to raise the profile of research conducted by many exceptional women scientists and inspire the next generation of women researchers. The research completed by the five laureates of the 2024 International Awards delivers significant advances for the health of humanity and encourages us to continue the fight."*

Lidia Brito, Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences at UNESCO, said: *"Empowering women in science is a question of equity and pragmatism. Women make up half of the population and it will take all of human ingenuity to tackle the daunting challenges we face, be it environmental degradation, climate and biodiversity disruption, pandemics, technological divide or persistent poverty. It is encouraging to see a growing number of women among Nobel Prizes in science. Since 1901, 25 women have received this distinction, among them 15 since the creation of the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science programme in 1998. Six out of these 15 women had previously been recipients of the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards before being awarded the Nobel Prize."*

About the Fondation L'Oréal

The Fondation L'Oréal supports and empowers women to shape their future and make a difference in society, focusing on three major areas: scientific research, inclusive beauty and climate action.

Since 1998, the L'Oréal-UNESCO *For Women in Science* programme has worked to empower more female scientists to overcome barriers to progression and participate in solving the great challenges of our time, for the benefit of all. For 26 years, it has supported more than 4400 women researchers from over 110 countries, rewarding scientific excellence and inspiring younger generations of women to pursue science as a career.

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. It also enables underprivileged women to gain access to employment with dedicated vocational beauty training. On average, around 16,000 people have access to these free treatments every year and more than 35,000 people have taken part in professional beauty training, since the beginning of the programme.

Finally, women are affected by persistent gender-based discrimination and inequalities, exacerbated by climate change. While they are on the frontline of the crisis, they remain under-represented in climate decision-making. The *Women and Climate* programme of the Fondation L'Oréal supports, in particular, women who are developing climate action projects addressing the urgent climate crisis and raises awareness of the importance of gender-sensitive climate solutions.

¹ [UNESCO Science Report: the Race Against Time for Smarter Development \(chapter 3\)](#)

² SheFigures ³ Nobel Foundation

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. Its Director-General is Audrey Azoulay.

"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.

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