



## SUSTAINABILITY

# Dior Renews Partnership With UNESCO to Support Female Students



Tamu McPherson interviews three mentees at the Women@Dior conference.

- In the last five years, 2,500 women have been mentored through its Women@Dior program.

BY JOELLE DIDERICH

**PARIS** – Dior has extended its partnership with UNESCO to provide opportunities for young women through its Women@Dior mentoring and educational program.

Olivier Sastre, deputy managing director in charge of human resources and sustainable development at Dior, made the announcement on Thursday at the fifth edition of the annual event, held at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Dior joined forces with UNESCO's Global Education Coalition to launch an online learning platform to address school closure gaps and expand the company initiative globally.

Participants have access to courses taught by professors from schools such as Central Saint Martins in London, Bocconi University in Milan and HEC in Paris.

To date, 2,500 women of 140 nationalities have been mentored through the program, which pairs students of business, engineering, art and fashion from selected universities with Dior employees.

"This community is unstoppable," Sastre enthused. "You are bright, bold and talented, you are changemakers acting with purpose, energy and impact. You show curiosity and a will to learn and grow. Innovation is part of who you are. You bring fresh ideas to every challenge."

To be sure, the meeting lacked the star power of Maria Grazia Chiuri, who stepped down in May as artistic director of women's collections at Dior. She was succeeded by Irish designer Jonathan Anderson.

During previous editions, Chiuri shared her feminist message and chaired a jury that chose winners of the Dream for Change Project to empower women and girls in their local communities.

This time around, the two winners were selected by the audience among five finalists pitching their initiatives on stage.

They were Mama Maisha, a nongovernmental organization that aims to teach financial literacy to female vendors in Kenya's informal markets, and Femini'lab, a French platform for young women entrepreneurs which organizes workshops in high schools and runs an online training platform.

## Women's Rights Under Attack

"In our challenging world shaped by social, environmental and technological shifts, women's empowerment and inclusion are priority needs," Delphine Arnault, chairman and chief executive officer of Christian Dior Couture, said in a video message.

"Now more than ever, the education of women is essential for building a more sustainable society," she added. "It truly makes a difference, because beyond ideas, we're seeing a movement that is actively transforming lives on the ground and strengthening leadership of women."

Attendees heard uplifting speeches by world champion skydiver Domitille Kiger and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Zuriel Oduwale, whose advocacy work helped pave the way for a law criminalizing child marriage in Mozambique.

But speakers highlighted challenges, too, at a time when women's rights are under attack worldwide.

"When there are crises, whatever crises – wars, pandemic or climate crisis – girls and women are the first ones that are hit, and this is why we need to have stronger focus, stronger attention to girls'

education, girls' empowerment, women's empowerment across the world," said Audrey Azoulay, director general of UNESCO.

Maud Alvarez-Pereyre, group chief human resources officer at LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, which owns Dior, said the company is grappling with challenges ranging from the impact of artificial intelligence on the workplace to a slowdown in spending on luxury goods.

"It's really a tsunami of changes for us," she said, adding that this has hampered progress toward gender equality.

"In a crisis, it's not only in the world that equality is going back and gender equity, it's also in companies," Alvarez-Pereyre noted. "Times are tough at the moment, and what you see is that there is less and less women CEOs, so it's really a worry."

French conductor Zahia Ziouani, who

took part in the closing ceremony of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, said she founded her own orchestra, Divertimento, in part because there are still few opportunities for women in her profession. "It's almost as difficult as when I started 25 years ago, when I was a beginner, so there is still a lot to do," she emphasized.

## Behind the 'Trad Wife' Trend

The meeting concluded with a panel led by fashion creative Tamu McPherson in which she discussed the rise of the "trad wife" trend on social media with three mentees.

"Is it performative, or is it a true trend moving into a direction in the past? And what about women who wholeheartedly want to aspire to this identity? What about their feelings? What's driving them back to a time last seen in the 1950s?" she questioned.

Sanjana Nurani, the cofounder of SheStrength, a Mumbai-based NGO that seeks to empower women through self-defense training and mentorship, argued that all choices are valid provided they're authentic. "Empowerment isn't about what you do, it's about why you do it," she said.

"If you do something because it fulfills you, if you choose to do it, that is empowering, but if you're doing it because of societal pressure, it becomes a performance. It becomes something you're forced to do. That's not empowering," she said.

Tiyi Ayevea, 25, said many women of her generation were frazzled by economic and geopolitical upheaval.

"It's safe to say that our generation has dealt with a certain level of burnout or fatigue, and I think that's also why a lot of women are turning towards this idea of being a 'trad wife,'" she said.

At 16, Ayevea founded an NGO focused on educating youth about gender inequality in Japan. She is now cofounder and CEO of Passelle, a sustainable fashion tech start-up. Despite her remarkable achievements, she is skeptical of the "leaning in" philosophy.

"This idea of having it all, it's also a very gendered expectation. We don't ask men to have the perfect careers and the perfect body and the perfect skin and to be amazing homemakers," she remarked.

"It's really about being grateful for what you have, waking up every day and choosing not to be perfect, but to be fully human, and just going toward your goals, step by step, one at a time," she said.



Dior and UNESCO officials with the finalists of the Dream for Change Project at the Women@Dior conference.