

Engaging with the Media to Address India’s Population Misinformation Crisis

India stands at a demographic crossroads: now the world’s most populous nation, yet its Total Fertility Rate has fallen below replacement level in all but five states. These twin realities fuel opposing but harmful narratives – fears of a “population explosion” spurring control measures and worries of a “population collapse” prompting pronatalist policies. The real story is a window of opportunity – to invest in health, education, and gender equality for a large young population, nearly half of whom are women. Population Foundation of India works with media to bring evidence and nuance, reframing population from a crisis to a catalyst for inclusive development.

Approaches

Evidence Compilation

PFI compiles and translates demographic evidence into simple, compelling content—infographics, myth-busting explainers, and data briefs—to help journalists and decision-makers understand population trends.

Tech Tools

PFI has developed a digital knowledge portal that provides reporters, academics, and civil society members with quick access to reliable information on population, gender, health, and gender-based violence – available in both English and Hindi.



Media Collaboration

PFI builds relationships with leading national and international outlets, and even social media voices, supplying data, expert quotes, authoring op-eds, and joining TV and online panels to inject facts and gender-sensitive perspectives into breaking news cycles.

Narrative Framing

PFI reframes population from a crisis to a catalyst for inclusive development—emphasising investments in women, young people, and the elderly as key to reaping India’s demographic, gender and silver dividends.



Key Moments in Media Engagement

2014	2019-22	2021-2022	2023	2024- Present
Sterilisation Tragedy	Thwarting Attempts at “Population Control” Legislation	Uttar Pradesh Population Policy	India Becomes Most Populous Country	Delimitation Debate & Minority Myths
Event: Deaths at a sterilisation camp in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh.	Event: A stringent Population Control Bill introduced in parliament.	Event: UP Population (Control, Stabilisation and Welfare) Bill proposed strict measures.	Event: UN State of the World Population Report states India’s numbers have surpassed China.	Event: Public debates sparked by political and community leaders’ comments over delimitation and myths about minority population growth.
PFI Action: Led a fact-finding mission; findings were widely reported in the media and informed the Supreme Court’s landmark Devika Biswas vs Union of India judgment, ending sterilisation camps and mandating quality-of-care guidelines.	PFI Action: Produced data-backed briefs and extensive media outreach highlighting harms; contributed to withdrawal of the bill in 2022.	PFI Action: Quoted widely in national and international articles opposing the coercive draft; provided evidence and technical inputs and facilitated the drafting of a more progressive state population policy.	PFI Action: 200+ media engagements domestically and globally reframed the “population crisis” into an opportunity for demographic and gender dividends.	PFI Action: Debunked misinformation, authored opeds and provided journalists with fact-based information and expert commentary to prevent divisive narratives from taking hold.

Impact Highlights (2023–2025)

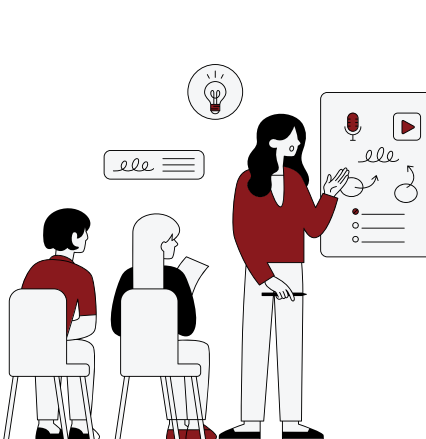
400+ Media Features PFI’s experts have featured in op-eds, interviews, and news stories across leading national and international outlets, shaping narratives on population, SRH, and gender.	50+ TV / Online Panels & Podcasts PFI leadership brought in evidence and gender-sensitive perspectives into high-visibility debates across television and digital media across the world.	170 Million+ People Reached Digitally PFI’s social media presence and collaborations amplified evidence-based messaging on family planning and demographic change to diverse audiences across India and abroad.
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Lessons/ Implications



Media as Multiplier

When evidence and rights-based messaging are seeded into mainstream and digital media, they ripple outward—amplifying accurate information on population, SRH, and gender to millions and shifting public discourse faster than traditional strategic engagement alone.



Invest in Journalist Capacity

Training, toolkits, and timely support for reporters create a network of informed storytellers who can cover complex demographic issues responsibly and counter myths before they spread.



Reframe the Narrative

By moving beyond the “population explosion vs. population collapse” framing, PFI positions India’s demographic change as an opportunity to invest in women, adolescents, and the elderly—turning a perceived crisis into a catalyst for inclusive development.

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